

**Cross-cultural crisis management: Do cultural similarities provide  
for equal media perception during crisis?**

*A case study of the Deepwater Horizon and BP's crisis communication*



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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates whether cultures with similar characteristics perceive crisis in the same way. In order to observe this phenomenon I took BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico as a case study. The accident occurred in April 2010 and BP, a British organization, was viewed as the principal responsible party for the accident in US territory. Previous studies in the field confirmed that culture is considered a critical element during crisis. However this study differs from others by contrasting countries, (the US & UK) that have many cultural similarities. This was achieved through discourse analysis of US (CNN) and UK (BBC) media coverage of the accident for the fifteen days immediately following the accident. The research material confirmed that despite cultural similarities both medias channels perceived and reacted to the event differently. Furthermore the theories of Cultural Dimension and Face-Negotiation guided me to an improved understanding of the cultural characteristics of the UK and US. Those cultural similarities are in fact a major reason for the diverging perception of the event the countries have.

**Keywords: BP, HSE, Oil Spill, Crisis Communication, Intercultural Communication, Deepwater Horizon, Macondo.**

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Karen Lindoso, November 2012

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**ANP:** Brazilian National Petroleum Agency

**BBC:** British Broadcasting Corporation

**CNN:** Cable News Network

**OPA:** Oil Pollution Act

**SAFE:** Safety Award For Excellence

**UK:** United Kingdom

**US:** United States of America

## **1 Chapter 1: Introduction**

Organizations usually implement their communications strategies in stable environments, where the communication process can be easily monitored and constantly observed. However environments are not always stable and very often organizations have to face controversial or drastic situations which require a quick response and careful strategic positioning (Fearn-Banks, 2001). According to Coombs there is no organization immune to crisis. He also stated that bad things could happen, even to organizations with good services, products and/or a well-established reputation (1999: p. 1).

Certain events are difficult to control and no matter how hard the company tries to create a stable environment and be attentive to external factors it can end up in a crisis situation. When this happens being prepared is the key in any organizational situation. If the company is not prepared to respond quickly and with agility, years of building a good reputation can be damaged in a matter of seconds (Siomkos & Kurzbard, 1994). In other words, in the global and digital market of today, quick and adequate response is required as soon as an event occurs.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Businesses nowadays are operating in environments that reward non-border barriers. For instance, in order to become more profitable companies are investing in international markets-trying to increase their presence and market their products. Consequently organizations are dealing and being confronted with cultures that they are not familiar with. As a result, this lack of knowledge can cause misinterpretation of information and lead to conflicts. “Complicating matters is the fact that transnational organizations can encounter crises in multiple countries or in host countries that are very different from their home countries” (Coombs, 2010: p. 722). In addition “understanding cross-cultural differences in conflict management style and crisis communicative strategy is essential to the practice of public diplomacy and

public relations, especially given the globalized business economy and the proliferation of international trade agreements” (Huang & Bedford: 2009).

As a conclusion, being aware of the impact of cultural differences is the first step to assure effective and strategic communication in international public relations activities. It is an important debate for crisis communication researchers and practitioners due to the increasing demands of and on global organizations and the relatively little existing knowledge of the subject.

New digital technology is also an important element that increases communication flow. According to Coombs, (1999) new technologies can promote the communication transmission and “help to make the world a smaller place”. “Crisis is now global, thanks to communication technology. News is global” (p. 6). Online communities are being formed due to similarities, shared values and beliefs.

Therefore understanding the influence that culture can have on individuals can help predict public behavior and actions-an extremely important strategic skill for communicators. There are many studies in the field where researchers affirm that the influence of culture can shape and direct individuals’ values and consequently affect human actions. “Culture influences actions not by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by shaping a repertoire or ‘tool kit’ of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct ‘strategies of action’ (Swidler, 1986: p.273). Taking into consideration that preparedness is the key to a well-planned crisis communication strategy, being able to predict the public’s expectations could be considered the success factor. Communicators and researchers then need to make a good use of this tool in order to create a successful crisis communication plan.

In addition, cultures tend to have different perceptions and expectations regarding crisis and conflicts. For international organizations crisis can be dynamic and involve several different elements (Coombs, 2010). In other words, facing an issue or a rumour in a host country the company would probably take actions according to the communication guidelines from headquarters, which could be different to what would be expected by the host society. Not only would the message be ineffective, but it also could turn out to be harmful and make the situation even worse.



Previous studies in this field mainly observed cross-cultural crisis management strategies between countries with different cultural patterns. For instance Amom & Hallahan (2003) analyzed the strategies on crisis communication adopted by two airline companies in different countries (US and Japan) after an airplane crash. Despite the accidents being similar and with only ten days of interval between them, the researchers found important signs that demonstrated differences regarding the strategies adopted and which cultural elements play an important role in this.

Furthermore Huang and Bedford's (2009) study analysed the so-called Hainan Incident through the conflict context/relationship of the countries involved: China and the United States. The Hainan Incident happened as a result of a military incident on the coast of China due to an accident between a US & Chinese fighter jet. Based on different approach used by each country to deal with the case the study concluded that main reason was due to countries' differences. According to the study, China as a collectivistic society responded differently to the situation than the USA an individualistic society. In this case it confirmed the importance of these distinctions. Therefore is also easier to identity those elements in order to analyse cross-cultural communications. The more peculiar the countries are, the easier it is to utilise the material for comparative analysis.

These elements are also important for the development and further clarification of the field. By comparing countries with different/opposite characteristics the field of cross-cultural crisis management gained more funding and support, also important for the evolution of the area. But what happens in crisis situations that involve countries with similar cultures? Can cultural similarities be a valuable resource in resolving a crisis or, could these similarities actually inhibit resolution?

This thesis will differ from the research described above by focusing on countries that present similar cultural elements. According to Kelley & Worthley, (1981) much of the work in the field of cross-cultural management is based "with the identification and description of differences across-cultures" (p. 164). Therefore comparing countries with similar cultural elements can bring a new insight into the communication and crisis management field. I will observe two nations that share many values: The United States and The United Kingdom. "The two countries share a common language, a lot of history and a very similar culture. In fact, the British often

refer to the Americans as the ‘cousins’ emphasizing this closeness” (Knight, 2010). The general public would probably affirm that these similarities are important to make sure that in case they face conflict it would be solved quickly and in the best way for both sides. However that it is not always the case.

For instance in April 2010 BP, a British organization, faced a major global crisis due an accident which occurred in the Gulf of Mexico, US. The episode, also known as the Deepwater Horizon or Macondo oil spill resulted from an oil rig explosion. It caused eleven deaths and seventy serious injuries, not to mention the enormous environmental impact (Adam, D., 2010). There were significant international repercussions and extensive media coverage about the case.

According to the Daily Mail newspaper “American politicians and broadcasters have laid the blame for the accident on the Deepwater Horizon rig at the feet of the UK - despite BP being a multinational company” (Peev et. al, 2010). Furthermore a member of UK Parliament, Andrew Rosindell, stated his frustration of the blame of the event towards English society: “It is not the British government or the British people who are to blame. It's a multinational company and it is up to them to fix this” (Alfano, 2010). Another British politician that raised criticism about the way US public handled the situation was the Business Secretary, Vince Cable, which alleged US action towards the event as "extreme and unhelpful" (Gribben & Spillius, 2010).

A statement made by the American President Barack Obama cited the event as “the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced” (White House June 15, 2010). BP struggled for several months to stop the leak and clean the area. The rig was finally repaired in July, three months after the initial incident (“Timeline BP oil spill”, 2010).

In an article published by The Economist the newspaper stressed the massive impact that the event, caused by a single company had on Britain and how it might have affected other British companies operating in US. “BP's woes may also reflect badly on other British firms doing business in America. Since April some parts of the press have taken to calling the firm British Petroleum to stress Britain's role in the disaster, even though the company rebranded to become BP in 2001” (“BP and British Petroleum”, 2010). Furthermore as reported by a survey with British professionals launched in 2010, nearly 67% believe that how BP handled the situation it might have

materially damaged other British businesses' reputation as well (The Chartered Quality Institute, 2010).

Additionally, BP's reputation was severely damaged. "According to Covalence, an organisation that tracks the ethical reputation of large companies, BP's standing has fallen off a cliff as the spill has progressed without a resolution. The company awarded BP a grade E, its lowest, in a ranking used by some ethical investors" (Harvey, F., 2010). Yet surprisingly the company spent more than \$90m on public relations in the first three months of the spill (Vidal, J., 2011).

Thus when the USA and UK faced a conflict in 2010, the repercussions of the case could not have been worse. The countries battled to sustain their individual viewpoints about the case and there was no possible way they could head towards agreement. "... a growing circle of British politicians and commentators now see the U.S. fury at BP's response to the Deepwater Horizon spill as an attack on Britain itself, and Mr. Obama's anger at BP this week as a personal attack on the 'special relationship' between Britain and the United States" (Saunders, 2010). Both countries quickly took sides and defended their positions.

So in order to understand this case I have highlighted cultural aspects surrounding the event. Despite Britain and America sharing several cultural similarities such language, a common history and several shared values it did not soften the negative impact that BP brought to Britain's reputation and other British organizations. Therefore the aim of the paper is to observe whether cultural similarities can have an impact on the perception of conflicts. As I affirmed early the decision to conduct a study based on cultural similarities rather than differences is due to the major of work in intercultural crisis communication being already conduct based on cultural differences. Observing countries with cultural similarities I will be able to verify the role that culture plays even for similar countries and if it is confirmed being able to contribute with a new paradigm in the intercultural crisis communication field.

## 1.2 Research Question

With the aim of understanding this case and observing whether similar cultures have any impact on the interpretation of crisis communication I have guided the study on the following question:

*Do news media organizations in countries that share similar culture perceive crisis in the same way?*

I want to observe through this study if the fact that countries with similar cultural aspects influence the way the media of these countries interpret crisis situation. In order to answer the research question the study will be based on an analysis of the media coverage presented by two news organizations representing the two countries involved in the situation: the BBC from the United Kingdom and CNN from the United States. These broadcasters were chosen due their significant influence and for being “decisive actors in determining policies and outcomes of significant events” (Gilboa, 2005). The media perspective was chosen because the media has an important role in society and can have “predictable effects on how people view issues and points of contention” (Druckman, 2001). Furthermore according to van Dijk (1993) “specific types of social and political events . . . the news media are the main source of information and beliefs used to form the interpretation framework for such events . . . ” (p. 242-243).

All in all society tends to guide its attention and formulate thoughts according to news media agenda setting and it is vital for public relations practitioners to understand how their messages tend to be reported by the media (Ray 1999). Furthermore based on the literature review of the field I observed that several cases of crisis communication were based on the media coverage of an event. Therefore I followed the same pattern in my study. However it is important to mention that the results represent views articulated by BBC and CNN and could differ if other media channels were observed.

The material will be gathered online and will represent the online written material from two television stations’ coverage of the fifteen days following the accident. The data will be analyzed through a discourse analysis framework. In this study the language and the implicit message portrayed on the news will be an important source

of observation. Language is not neutral and discourses can “create representations of the world that reflect as well as actively construct reality by ascribing meanings to our world, identities and social relations” (Joey, 2010). In addition in order to create a meaningful representation, the text cannot be isolated from the cultural context. Therefore observing media coverage through discourse analysis framework will provide a tool to analyze the language, context and cultural aspects related to the articles at the same time. Therefore will provide a holistic view of the media coverage and allow identifying if BCC and CNN perceived the event through the same perspective.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

In order to highlight and comprehend crisis communication and cultural aspects, the study will be based on the following theoretical framework. Firstly I will apply the Cultural Dimensions Theory of Geert Hofstede (1980). The theory developed by Hofstede is related to cultural similarities/differences among countries. Hofstede analysed United Kingdom and United States and identified that the countries are in fact countries with similar culture patterns. Furthermore the theory will allow observe cultural characteristics of both countries and verify if those characteristics play a crucial element during crisis situations. Ultimately this will provide valuable information relating to the cultural features of UK and US and clarification if these features represent a threat during crisis. For this study it means that based on this theory I will be able to present information of how UK and US culturally behave and how these comportment were translate in the media coverage of the event.

The second theoretical framework I will apply is the Face-Negotiation theory by Stella Ting-Toomey (1985). This theory relates to how individuals, based on cultural background, portray their feelings and actions in society in order to safeguard their image towards others especially during crisis. The Face-Negotiation theory will provide the study with insights into crisis communication and the role of cultural elements intrinsic to the situation, two crucial aspects for the understanding of the Deepwater Horizon event. Therefore since the study aims to understand crisis’ perception according to culture’s background the theory can be a valuable source of

information to understand how this occurs and identify the tactics applied by United States and United Kingdom during conflicts and how this was interpreted in the media coverage of the Deepwater Horizon.

## **2 Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspective**

In this chapter the aim is to identify and critically analyse the most important studies of intercultural communication in crisis situations and the Cultural Dimensions and Face-Negotiation theories. I intend, through observation of the current studies and research areas in the field, to cover several topics addressing the cultural aspects of crises and conflicts. Analysing these contributions, I will be able to present the latest developments in the field and to point out aspects that demand further improvement. As a result of this, I will also be able to suggest direction for complementary studies and reinforce the importance of this work to the field of communication and organizational management.

The Face-Negotiation theory will help understand the concept of face and how culture relates to it. In addition the Cultural Dimensions will provide a background to analyze UK and US cross-cultural differences and how this could lead to barriers in crisis management. These theoretical frameworks combined will help to clarify the event and guide us towards a better understanding of cultural aspects in unstable situations, specifically with respect to the UK and US involvement.

### **2.1 Aspects that influence organizational crisis**

The media is seen as an important and influential channel when a crisis occurs. The media set the public agenda by giving coverage to subjects that then become part of the public domain which creates a “political and social agenda, and prompts a fundamental shift in government thinking” (Yeomans & Tench: 2009, p. 367). Consequently, this shift can adjust regulations and/or change legislative bodies, which in the future could lead to business model modifications. When a single organization changes its business model it can lead to the change of a whole industry and/or segment.

For instance, after an oil spill accident in Brazil in 2011, Chevron was forced by the Brazilian Government to readjust its activities and business model due to changes in legislation as a result of the incident. According to the Brazilian National Petroleum Agency (ANP) Chevron was negligent and the company's responses to the spill and cleanup efforts were insufficient (Kiernan & Gilbert, 2011). In addition to a fine of \$28 million, Chevron also had its drilling activities suspended temporarily by the Brazilian National Petroleum Agency -ANP (Darlington, S., 2011). ANP also considered rejecting Chevron's request to drill oil in deep-water in the same region that the spill occurred.

The accident, which received huge coverage by the local media, set the debate in the public sphere as to whether oil companies in Brazil were investing enough in environmental safety procedures (Bavdek, M., 2011). This debate could result in the modification of processes involving oil and gas companies operating in Brazil. It could also lead to a change of the whole energy industry, reshaping their business landscape. In this case, the agenda setting and the debate surround regulation and safety in the energy industry occurred after the crisis situation.

Since the media is viewed as an influential source of social effect "through its power to shape issue agendas and public discourse", it is considered a valuable tool to measure event's perceptions (Richardson, 2007: p. 13). In addition, the media can "articulate a clear actual or perceived threat; identify a victim and expose a possible culprit, negative news coverage and/or a public campaign becomes a high probability" (Yeomans & Tench: 2009, p. 367). Therefore the media is viewed as an essential source of propagation and debate facilitator.

Heath & Bryant (1992) sustain that the communication paradigm has been transferred from the message sender (i.e. distribution of the information) to the receiver (i.e. interpretation of messages and creation of meaning) what they called the "third step" of the communication research. As a result the media coverage gained importance and visibility in the crisis communication field. "One of the very important functionalities of the mass media is their role as both gatekeepers and agenda setters in the public sphere" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 430).



In addition the media coverage has an impact on how stakeholders perceive the conflict/crisis in question. “The influence of print and electronic media is pervasive and their role in a crisis is fundamental and powerful. Stakeholder perception of an organizational crisis is based, more often than not, on media interpretation of the event” (Ray, 1999: p. 105).

According to Coombs (2012) how public perceive crisis is associated with three main factors: the pre and post crisis, the influence and coverage of the media and stakeholder’s feedback. Crisis’ perception is related to how stakeholders see the company’s reputation. Furthermore he affirms that media coverage has greater impact on stakeholders during the phase involving the crisis itself. It is during this phase that stakeholders receive information about the crisis and based on that they will (re) shape company’s reputation. “The media portrayals of the organization and the crisis can be critical in shaping the perceptions of other stakeholders involved in the crisis (p. 174).

Additionally he affirms that if the media coverage is negative, it will also negatively affect stakeholders’ perception of the event and vice versa. “Thus, if the media are critical of the organization, its reputation with stakeholders could suffer. Conversely, the reputation would be protected by favorable media portrayals” (p. 174). Also how the media initially approach it will interfere public’s perception of the event. “What the news media report in their first stories – and how they view your coping skills – will often set the tone for the entire crisis. Chances are, the media’s first impression will persist until you have overcome the problem...” (Jones, 2005: p.9). That means during the first hours and/or days of a crisis situation the media’s coverage influence public’s perception of the entire event. Additionally if the coverage is negative the company’s reputation can be damaged no matter what is the event’s outcome.

In this study I chose to analyse media perception of the Deepwater Horizon. Instead of analysing BP’s strategy during the oil spill I opted to analyse the impact and reaction it had on the media coverage. Based on previous information I can affirm that the findings will be a good representation of how the UK and US transmitted the event and the line of debate they were willing to instigate in society.

According to Coombs (2010) during crisis or incidents the main tool used to update the general public is information. How the company communicates with stakeholders and society will define the impact that the event will have for the company's reputation. So crisis communication is the process of analysis, evaluation and implementation of communication strategies based on the organization's value and the surrounded environment. It is considered an important part of the public relation strategy and nowadays has an important role in the business environment (p.19).

Moreover, there are several factors that can influence a company's reputational threat in the public sphere and the media. First is the degree of public emotion involved in relation to the topic (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 430). Some issues tend to have more impact based on a high emotional attachment that they represent to society. Sometimes the media in order to associate the reader with the story utilizes linguistic elements in their articles. For instance the implementation of new journalistic elements or how some authors prefer to name it literary nonfiction. New Journalism is considered the inclusion of literature elements into news. This adaption has resulted in news capturing aspects of novelty, so the consequences according to Hartsock (2000) are "social or cultural allegory, with potential meanings beyond the literal in the broadest sense of allegory's meaning". He also states that these allegories "are about embracing an understanding of the social or cultural other" (p. 22). As a result the reader would associate the story with recognizable elements belonging to its circle of interests and domain.

Another way to create emotional attachment with the audience is by the inclusion of feature style. It is viewed as "a way of giving news the kind of depth and context often missing in electronic journalism. Feature writers turned away from the quaint personality and the offbeat scene to focus on newsworthy people and issues. Since then, the use of features to analyse, interpret and provide background on important issues has become standard procedure on most American newspapers" (Fox, 2001: p.125).

It can be applied by inclusion of direct quotes and the presence of heroic figures. According to Emile Durkheim "the presence of moral exemplars of heroic figures, particularly in a time of crisis or societal shift, can help affirm boundaries, strengthen

collective identity, and promote solidarity and consensus” (cited in Monahan, 2010: p. 142).

Additionally according to some authors, the inclusion of direct quotes enhances the liveliness of the story. “Direct quoting lends the news story an air of immediacy: readers sense they are hearing the words directly from the source’s mouth. This feeling of immediacy enhances the story’s credibility and encourages readers to respond directly to the speaker and his or her ideas” (Whitaker et al., 2009).

Moreover the media reinforces crisis by exaggerating the event. According to Wenger (1985) the media uses this resource of exaggeration and negative projection of disasters to make it more dramatic and to attract society’s attention to the issue. “It is argued that the media distorts reality by focusing upon the atypical event and individual, and thus making them appear to be typical, by focusing only upon the scenes of destruction, by ‘framing’ the news story within preconceived notions of what should occur, rather than what is actually occurring, and by focusing upon the most dramatic, visual, or exciting elements, as opposed to perhaps the most significant elements” (p. 9).

Additionally, the media, wherever possible, will reinforce and conduct a debate when the theme raises concern in people’s lifestyle and safety. For instance, the energy industry is an industry that requires a special communication process since the topics surrounding the industry are often questioned in a negative perspective through media agenda setting. “Oil, gas, and chemical companies tend to be cast as villains, principally because public opinion tends to focus on their ‘downstream’ operations (e.g. oil fields, drilling rigs, production platforms, oil tankers, spillages, industrial sites) rather than the output (e.g. energy supply, plastic products, components in household appliances, clothing materials)” (Yeomans & Tench: 2009: p. 376).

Furthermore, oil and gas exploration and production run a high risk of causing major environmental disasters. Often these environmental accidents, beyond affecting the physical environment, also have an impact on the health, culture, economic and social structure- especially of local communities affected by the accident (Wawryk, 2003).

According to Annual ICM Crisis Report the oil industry in 2010 was the most crisis prone industry. Moreover, it has been in the top 10 list two years consecutively

(Annual ACM Crisis Report, 2011). Verifying strengths and weaknesses in the oil and gas industry regarding crisis management strategies will help to elaborate a more effective and efficient set of actions for responding to crises. “Certainly the oil and gas industry, with all of its logistical and environmental challenges, could also benefit from an increasingly sophisticated communication environment. In an industry defined by its operational challenges, the ability to communicate in real-time impacts everything from employee safety and crisis management to exploration and production advancements” (Mustarde, 2011).

Economic factors such as globalization, also intensify the occurrence and probability that an issue becomes a crisis. According to Coombs and Holladay (2010) globalization increases the probability of an organization facing a crisis. “Crises communication becomes international in scope, crosses national boundaries, and becomes increasingly complex. The international potential of a crisis is compounded by the near real-time spread of information through the Internet and traditional news services” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 423). So nowadays corporations are more susceptible to facing unstable environments and uncertainty.

Finally the Internet also is changing the way debates are conducted. With the web 2.0 corporations are more likely to suffer from negative publicity by bloggers and adverse buzz on social networking faster than through traditional media. “Over the last 10 years, crisis management and communications have been forced to develop in response to a series of technology and IT-driven changes...At the same time single-issue groups and NGOs were recognizing the potential of the Internet. Now it is possible for a small group to drive campaigns across the Internet, while at the same time empowering individuals to express their opinions at the click of a mouse” (Seymour & Edelman, 2004).

This led to a consumer behavioural change. Consumers today have higher expectations of corporations’ activities and are more demanding of social environmental practices. “Consumers are paying more attention to the sources of food they eat and the safety of the products they buy for their children and use to transport them. Public support for free trade and globalization is tempered by concerns about worker displacement in wealthier countries and working conditions in developing economies. And the financial meltdown has increased calls for more transparency,

openness, and reforms of corporate governance” (Reputation Intelligence Report, 2010).

## 2.2 Intercultural Communication

First of all to understand how culture impact organizations is essential to analyse the concept of culture. Culture is defined extensively since it applies to many areas of expertise and interest. According to Kroeber and Kluchohn (1952) culture consists of “patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts, the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values, culture systems may, on the other hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action” (p. 181).

Culture is the code that helps individuals understand and give meaning to messages. “Culture helps govern and define the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. Your entire repertoire of communicative behaviours depends largely on the culture in which you have been raised” (Hall, 1977: p. 7).

According to Collier and Thomas (1988), culture is defined as “a historically transmitted system of symbols and meanings, and norms” (p.102). Those symbols can be analysed into two aspects. The first aspect is related to moral and it guide individuals of how to behave in order to be accept as a genuine entrant to a certain group. So individuals that want to be considered part of a group must follow the norms and rules imposed by them. The moral dimension is generally viewed as the norms and rules found in any civilization. They are legalized by institutions such churches, workplace, the family and so on and are defined as normative statements. According to Collier & Thomas (1988) normative statements provide specific symbols “that can direct inquiry toward core symbols” (p. 103). The core symbols are the elements that can differentiate one culture from another (Schneider, 1976: p. 104).

The second dimension is defined by the meaning. Meaning is considered the translator of how actions and situations must be represented according to a certain group. It also refers to the meaning of words what explains how similar words have different meanings in different cultures. “People with similar cultural identities are viewed as a system, the members of which share common verbal and nonverbal conduct patterns, common rules, and common goals/positive outcomes” (Collier & Thomas, 1988: p. 108).

According to Hofstede culture is seeing as “the collective mental programming of the people in an environment...it encompasses a number of people who were conditioned by the same education and life experience” (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988: p.43). As we can see the notion of culture is mainly linked with individuals and their interactions with each other and as a group. In addition culture’s meaning and communication style are related to people’s interaction. Since people are susceptible to changes and adaptations, culture also is a transitory process of modification and changes therefore it should not be analysed as a solid structure. According to Sarbaugh “people share a range of feelings such joy, anger, affection, excitement and so on. The nature these feelings will vary with the physical, social and psychological environment in which the person exists and it will influence this environment” (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988: p.28).

Also culture is related to the communication process itself of certain group. Since communication “is the process of using signs and symbols that elicit meanings” so culture and communication are connect and cannot be observed separately (Sarbaugh, 1988: p. 25).

Another important aspect in culture is the cultural identity concept. For instance when an individual is connected to a group and that group accepts the individual as a member they share the same symbols and meanings and follow the same rules. In other words, the cultural identity is a mutual understanding and acceptance of actions that are culturally appropriate. According to Collier and Thomas “when people are able to understand the identities that are manifest and able to describe differences in meaning or norms, they can begin to negotiate what would be more appropriate and effective for both of them” (p. 117).

Cultural identity is important because through heritage people find strength. The knowledge that the individual belongs to a group gives them support. Meanwhile, the group's conduct also defines individuals' comportment. As far as the group share the same rules members of the group are fully aware what is expected from them and how to behave in order to achieve it. The groups' expectations frame the individual's behaviour. In addition it also anticipated predictive behaviours, either positive or negative. "The sociological data are the principal kind used to predict the behaviour of people from the culture" (Gudykunst, 1988: p. 131).

According to Richard Thomson (2003) culture enable individuals understand their surroundings which, through a learning process by interaction, facilitate the enculturation process. "Whether we feed ourselves by growing yams or by herding camels and raising wheat, whether we explain a thunderstorm by attributing it to meteorological conditions or to a fight among the gods – such things are determined by what we learn as part of our enculturation" (Larry, Porter and Thomson, 2003: p.8).

Culture can also explain how uncertainty occurs, an important aspect when analyzing conflicts. As reported by Gudykunst (1988) uncertainty is "the creation of proactive predictions about other's attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behaviour, as well as retroactive explanations about other's behaviour" (p.123). In order to achieve intercultural adaptation is necessary minimize uncertainty through eight necessary variables: knowledge of host culture, shared networks, intergroup activities, favourable contact, stereotypes, cultural identity, cultural similarity, and second language competence (Gudykunst, 1988: p.124).

However when intercultural adaptation is not achieved then the other is seeing as a stranger, as an outsider. It means that the individual seeks to be accepted by the group but instead it is seem as an intruder. This relationship can create anxiety and often represent conflicts that could lead to crises (Gudykunst, 1988: p.126).

### 2.2.1 Intercultural Communication in Crisis Management

When it is referred to crisis management one relevant mentioned aspect is the interference of cultural elements. In order to assure an effective crisis communication plan is necessary to understand how cultural aspects shape and impact situations. This understanding will help the organization to be better prepared to deal with crisis and to apply effective communication strategies. This happen because effective crisis management is related to the combination of the company's actions/discourse and stakeholders' perception. "A crisis cannot be understood as an isolated part, but as a system. The variables associated with crises are interdependent and influence one another, ultimately impacting the whole. A crisis often resonates beyond the organization in crisis. Focusing solely on one entity limits our understanding of crisis and communication" (Ray, 1999: p.10).

Since perception is defined by the process "by which our cultures help create and shape our realities" the culture plays an important role in the process involving communication and public's perception (Singer, 1987: p. 9).

Additionally according to Richard Thomson (2003) the three major elements that influence individual's perception are: cultural values, worldview, and social organizations (p.11). The cultural values are the values that are transmitted through generations and individual's interaction in certain group. Since these values are learned, they are not universal, changing according to the groups' beliefs. "Values are basic convictions that people have regarding what is right and wrong, good and bad, important and unimportant. These values are learned from the culture in which the individual is reared, and they help direct the person's behaviour" (Luthans & Doh, 2009: p.101). As a result we can conclude that individuals that share the same nationality tend to perceive the same social environment similarly.

In fact transnational organizations are more susceptible to face unstable environment since "conflict is greater when the two cultures are very different than when they are similar" (Triandis, 1994). According to Triandis this cultural difference is called *cultural distance*. "When participants are highly similar in worldview, normative patterns, code systems, and perceived relationship and intent, then the level of interculturalness is low and communication will proceed with minimal effort and



maximum accuracy. Conversely, when participants are highly different on a combination of those four sets of variables, communication will require great effort and the outcome will not match the intent of participants” (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 22). As a result the lack of culture’s understanding could be a determining factor to business success. “Adapting to local cultural values that are transmitted through nations' political economy, education, religion, and language may create an additional burden for multinational enterprises operating in different countries” (Schwartz, 1999).

For instance in September 2005 twelve cartoons portraying the Islamic prophet Muhammed were released in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. A few days later a group of Muslims started a protest through emails and text messages against the publication. They claimed that the cartoons were a blasphemy and demanded an apology for Muslim society (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). Several events occurred relating to the event but it reached its climax on February 2006 when Danish Embassies and Consulates were attacked and set on fire all across the Middle East. Also in the beginning of the same year the Danish-Swedish dairy group, Arla Foods, suffered a boycott of its products in Saudi-Arabia and it is cited as one of the companies most affected by the consequences of the cartoon.

The importance of intercultural communication in crisis management is undeniable where culture “can be a critical factor in modern crisis communication” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p.423). In addition, it has direct influence in how stakeholders perceive strategies implemented by the organization during crises. How public relations professionals are adapting crisis management strategies towards international stakeholders is part of a new tendency in the communication field. Since it is a new communication process it requires further and deeper research in the field in order to develop and reach accurate conclusions.

Through the observation of studies analysing intercultural communication in crisis management strategies I have noticed that a large portion of the material found is based on case studies and media coverage. For instance, Haruta & Hallahan (2003) based their studies on the media coverage of two airline crashes both occurring in 1985. The study examines the crisis communication responses of the Delta airline crash-an American corporation-and its Japanese counterpart, Japan Air Lines. They

initiate their analysis by emphasising need for and the importance of further studies in this area, affirming that there is very little research on crisis communication that is specifically related to cultural aspects.

They claim the selection of these accidents was to verify companies' communication strategy in similar incidents in the same industry. The findings proved that each organization applied their communications strategies according to the corporate culture and stakeholder's expectations. "Although both airlines were obviously striving for the same goal of obtaining control over and alleviation of the crisis situation, each company followed a different set of protocols that had been thought through to meet the expectations of their own corporate and national cultures" (p. 123).

However, it is important to mention here that since the organizations have distinctly different cultural backgrounds, the crisis communication strategy could be a reflection of these cultural corporate identities and not the stakeholders' expectations. This means that there is no assurance that the organizations consciously adapted their communication strategies in order to affect positively the public's perception. For instance, the Japanese company probably dealt with the crisis following their corporate governance guidelines. Perhaps they were not framing a strategy based on a specific culture or background. It does not necessarily mean they were not prepared to deal with the situation, but the strategy could have been only a reflection of the corporate culture. The same applies to Delta Airlines.

Haruta & Hallahan highlight the importance of further comparison analyses between countries with cultural similarities. They state that cultural diversity is an important source of analysis, however "clear differences can be expected to be evident when comparing cultures as diverse as Japan and United States" (p. 129). As a result the cultural dimensions of comparison are greater and easily recognizable, providing achievable results. On the other hand, when we compare similar cultures such as the United Kingdom and the United States, dimensions are not so easily identifiable. Although it is challenging to identify these key features of covert cultural difference, doing so could lead to important findings in the field and provide new paradigms to elaborate crisis management in an international environment.

According to Lee (2004) and Huang (2006) “we have just began to explore how culture affects crisis communication” (cited in Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 722). As a result there is still considerable analysis and reflection required in the field in order to delineate the best strategies in intercultural crisis communication and comprehend deeply its ramifications. Through more studies in the field, researchers and professionals will have the opportunity to analyse past events, formulate hypothesis and simulate situations.

### **2.2.2 The importance of the spokespersons**

Another important research contribution to the field was made by Laura Arpan (2002) when she analysed the effects of using spokespersons within different/similar ethnic backgrounds and analysed the levels of acceptance by the publics. Being the spokesperson the representative of the organizations strategies and values “it seems prudent to consider how perceived spokesperson credibility is affected by the ethnicity of the spokesperson” (Arpan, 2002: p. 315). I consider this sphere of analysis important, because it combines the impact of communication with cultural aspects; which is the main factor of evaluation of my thesis.

Previous research in the area shows that communicators that are viewed by an audience as reliable are more likely to influence the acceptance of the message by the audience. Therefore the efficiency of an organizational message is related to the audience’s behaviour towards the spokesperson or the source of the message (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Furthermore embodied characteristics such accent intonation can also influence the construction of the credibility of the spokesperson through the two aspects: competence and trustworthiness (McCroskey & Young, 1981).

Arpan observed the impact of different ethnic identity in the level of content acceptance to the public. The ethnic identity components analysed by her were religion, racial and national origin and language. The results conducted by her showed that the credibility of the communicator and acceptance of the message content is directly related to the audience background and ideological similarity (p. 333). For

instance, when audiences whose individuals have a strong degree of ethnic grouping which is the same as the spokesperson in question, the credibility and acceptance of the message tends to be high. On the other hand, groups that do not have a strong degree of ethnic identity are more susceptible to questioning, rather than honouring the account of a spokesperson with different background (ibid).

Furthermore, individuals who perceive ideological similarities with the spokesperson tend to have a significant effect on credibility ratings. The author also mentions that the effects of the spokesperson's ethnicity might also be directly related to the country to which he/she is associated. As a result, spokespersons of less well-known countries might face more uncertainty.

The study is relevant since it points out the importance of including in the observation of a crisis management response the background/ideology, the similarity of a spokesperson denominated by the organization and the audience profile of the group they desire to influence. As an illustration of this statement I cite the different perceptions that the same report generated in the United States and United Kingdom, when in 1994, the US Senate Intelligence Committee and the British inquiry sent a message to their corresponding countries with identical content about the Iraqi's program for weapons of mass destruction. Essentially both reports stated that they could not find any evidence that Iraq was conducting the development of a nuclear weapons program. However the way the message was transmitted reflected very differently on the credibility of both governments. While the Director of the CIA resigned, the head of the British Joint Intelligence was promoted (Reynolds, P., 2004). The message was the same but it had different perceptions and as a consequence different results and impact. Therefore this case exemplifies that despite sharing many cultural aspects in common, the United States and United Kingdom also have peculiar and different interpretations of some events.

### **2.3 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory**

Geert Hofstede (1980) defined culture as the mental programming of beliefs and values of a group which distinguishes a group from another (1983b: p. 78). In 1980

after an empirical investigation of 53 countries Hofstede identified four dimensions of national cultural variability that influence culture elements. They are the power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity.

Observing UK and US through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (see graph below) it is possible to see that both countries share similar characteristics of cultural aspects. It is considered an expected result and it only confirms the culturally similarities that both countries are known as have. Those similarities could be incorrectly perceived as an advantage when it is related to intercultural crisis management. It is natural to think that more similarities the countries share easily is to control and manage conflicts. And based on these similarities countries could have a better understanding of each other behaviours so actions could be anticipated and expectations better achieved. So the relationship between them would be solid and transparent. However as I noted those similarities could also represent an obstacle, as I will explain further.

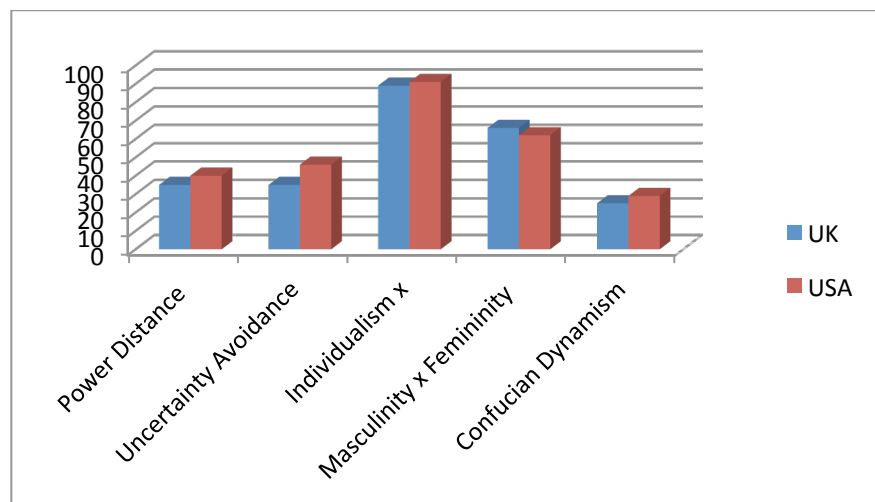


Figure 1: Hofstede Cultural Dimension

Hofstede, G. (1980). Cultural Dimensions. Retrieved from: <http://geert-hofstede.com/index.php>

**Power Distance** is considered the “extent to which less powerful members of institution and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede and Bond, 1984: p. 419). So countries that do not contest the hierarchy power of their bosses usually are influenced by the high power distance features. In this system strict obedience is a fundamental feature in any type of relationship, also including the organizational system.

At the same time societies with low-power distance organizations tend to be decentralized and with flatter structures. In addition there is less direct supervision and usually the low workforce positions are formed by qualified professionals. By contrast, in high-power distance work force organizations tend to be centralized and with a tall structure. Furthermore direct and constant supervision is essential and workers in the lower strata have lower qualifications. In these societies the system promotes inequality at different levels (Luthans & Doh, 2009: p. 105).

**Uncertainty Avoidance** “involves the lack of tolerance in a culture for uncertainty and ambiguity” (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 140). Countries that have high uncertainty avoidance do not like to take risks because the individuals of this population do not like uncertainties. These countries strongly believe in experts and they share a high level of anxiety among its individuals (ibid).

So in order to deal with anxiety these countries have a complex and structure way to define organizational activities. As or instance “more written rules, less risk taking by managers, lower labor turnover, and less ambitious employees” (Luthans & Doh, 2009: p. 105). By contrast countries with low uncertainty avoidance are not afraid of the unknown so they are willing to take risks and deal with uncertainty. As a consequence they have less structure in their activities and organizations encourage their employees to use initiative and assume responsibility for their actions.

**Individualism X Collectivism:** Individualism according to Hofstede is when individuals tend to look only after themselves and/or close family members. This group is mainly concern with the achievement of their goals and needs. In the other hand a collectivism society is viewed when individuals look after a group, taking care of each other in order to achieve loyalty and happiness. In this type of society individuals tend to be considered part of the group. “Individualistic cultures are concerned with the authenticity of self-presentation style. Emphasize individualist goals over group goals, individualist rights and needs over collective responsibilities and obligations. Collectivist cultures are concerned with the adaptability of self-presentation style. Individualist values autonomy choices, and negative-face need.

Collectivist values interdependence, reciprocal obligations and positive-face need” (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 224).

Additionally the cultural variability approach of individualism-collectivism “serves as a conceptual grid in explaining why the meaning of ‘self’ and hence, ‘face’, varies across cultures” (Stella Ting-Toomey & Atsuko Kurogi, 1998). According to Ting-Toomey in individualistic cultures is extremely important to maintain a consistent self and public-image. In other hand collectivist cultures the “self” image protection varies according to the situation and concept. For instance UK and US are both countries that present individualistic features. Therefore independent of the situation they seek to protect their self-image and dignity towards others. When facing a situation that both countries are involved this characteristic can be the reason that the conflict takes longer to be solved or fixed. That means that both countries when face conflict will seek to defend their own *faces*.

**Masculinity X Femininity:** according to Hofstede masculinity societies are those that are concerned with money, power and unequal sex roles prevail. These countries give importance on “earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge”. For individuals living in masculine societies they are encouraged to be independent, to make their own decisions and usually their achievement is based on their job title and earning (Luthans & Doh, 2009: p.105).

In contrast feminine societies tend to care more about others and give more importance to quality of life. Usually in feminine societies the environment is friendly and they tend to cooperate with each other assuring an employment security. “Individuals are encouraged to be group decision makers, and achievement is defined in terms of layman contacts and the living environment” (Luthans & Doh, 2009: p. 106).

In 1991 Hofstede included a fifth national culture dimension: the Confucian dynamism also referred to as ‘long-term orientation’ – LTO. According to Hofstede this dimension is related with time-orientation and it consists of two opposite paradigms: the long-term orientation versus short-term orientation (see more information below).

Table Long-term orientation (Confucian dynamism) as a fifth dimension	
<u>Long-term orientation</u>	<u>Short-term orientation</u>
1. Persistence (perseverance)	1. Personal steadiness and stability
2. Ordering relationships by status and observing this order	2. Protecting your face
3. Thrift	3. Respect for tradition
4. Having a sense of shame	4. Reciprocation of greetings, favours and gifts

Figure 2: Long-term orientation

Hofstede, G. (1991: 165–6; 2001: 354–5)

The Confucian Dynamism relates to the individual's choice of effort either in the present (short-term) or in the future (long-term). The long-term represents a positive and dynamic future-oriented value that is related with four positive values: persistence (perseverance); ordering relationships by status and observing this order; thrift; and having a sense of shame. In the other hand the short-term represents a negative, static and traditional culture that is linked with four negative values: personal steadiness and stability; protecting the *face*; respect for tradition; and reciprocation of greetings, favours and gifts (Fang, 2003: p. 348).

For instance United Kingdom and United States both present a short-term orientation feature. Short-term oriented countries tend to be overprotective of their *face* (dignity). It means that when facing an uncomfortable or negative situation they feel threatened and/or attacked. As a consequence they apply, usually unconsciously, a series of statements and behaviours (*facework*) in order to save their dignity and reduce the impact of a negative situation.

Therefore UK and USA when confronted in a negative environment or situation tend to defend themselves and safe their *faces* (dignity). As a consequence it could transform the situation in an endless negotiation period what it could result in stress, discomfort and conflicts. Especially in unstable environments short-term oriented



countries can easily lead a conflict situation in misunderstandings, frustrations and transform the issue bigger than it initially was.

## 2.4 Face-Negotiation Theory

According to Stella Ting-Toomey (1994) conflict is “the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties over substantive and/or relational issues” (p.360). It is the type of situation where individuals are being threatened and their identity, behaviour and feelings are being called into question.

Moreover Stella affirms that conflict is a phenomenon that can happen in any social aspects and among every relationship in all cultures. So is a susceptible phenomenon. She further explains that when a conflict initiate individuals use a mechanism of defence, denominated *face*. The *face* is used to protection and a guideline of how to address the situation accordingly. It is the “individual’s claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction” (Ting-Toomey, 1994: p. 360).

As a result when individuals face any conflict they negotiate their own self-image in order to protect themselves and their identities. According to Brown & Levinson (1978) *face* is related to the public self-image that every individual wants to assert to herself/himself. In addition cultural values are responsible to guide individuals in the management of their *faces* or how to adopt their *facework* statements. So our values acquired by the cultural interaction shape how we handle and manage a conflict situation (Kim, Young Yun & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 214).

*“Face in essence, is a projected image of one’s self in a relational situation. It is an identity that is conjointly defined by the participants in a setting. However, the degree to which one wishes to project an “authentic self” in a situation and the degree to which one chooses to maintain a “social self” in a situation varies in accordance to the cultural orientations toward the conceptualization of selfhood”*(Kim, Young Yun & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 215).

During a conflict individuals negotiate many aspects involved in the situation. For instance they battle for their identity and a positive self-image. So these conflicts can also “pose threats to the situated identities of the negotiators” (Kim, Young Yun & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 213).

Some authors affirm that in order to address conflict situations organizations tend to protect their image by applying communication strategies that reinforce apologia for the situation by “offering a vigorous and compelling defense” of the case (Hearit, 2006: p.4). Through these strategies organizations neglect themselves of being identified as guilty and/or blamed for the situation. As a consequence they are able to restore/maintain a positive corporation’s image. The apologetic discourse is a theory of greater influence on the crisis communication field. However I opted for not included this theory into my study because I am willing to focus on the cultural aspects that the face protection strategies involves rather than the rhetorical discourse of the situation. Therefore the Face-Negotiation theory suits best the purpose of this study.

Nevertheless, besides conflicts, face-negotiation can also be observed during build-relationship situations. So face-negotiation is also useful for organizations dealing with publics which contact they have not had before; a fairly common situation nowadays due to globalization. The whole process is enhanced in the social context and individuals claim to have a well image-representation (*face*) towards other individuals. As a result when individuals have a negative experience involving a social context, such feelings of embarrassment, ashamedness, awkwardness and others, they tend to feel attacked and/or teased. As a consequence individuals feel the need to restore or save their dignity (*face*) applying a set of communication behaviours, denominate *facework*.

Both *face* and *facework* are universal however the tactics used by each individual are based on cultural determinations. “The value orientations of a culture will influence cultural members’ attitudes toward pursuing one set of *facework* more actively than others in a face-negotiation situation” (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 216). So a face-negotiation between different cultures could lead to a set of behaviours that together would not meet the necessary steps to fulfil a valid face-negotiation in order to

achieve social dignity. As a consequence it could cause confusion, waste of energy, stress and lead to conflicts. As a result it can be stated that the understanding of social negotiation can help solve situations that could be initially easily managed but if not well addressed it could cause greater damage. Therefore is considered an important tool for crisis communication practitioners and should be included in every situation where culture elements are visible.

## 2.5 Summary of Theoretical Framework

The impact of cultural elements in crisis management responses has strong influences on public perception during a crisis. Furthermore the role of the media in intercultural crisis communication was a constant in several cases observed. Crisis situations are the reflection of *social constructions* created in people's mind so we could affirm that massive media coverage is a fundamental element in the public's impact perception of crisis. Therefore regarding my study, the decision to analyse crisis communication through the media coverage perspective is an important element of understanding public perception. Media agenda setting can help define stakeholder's perspectives in any crisis. Consequently, understanding the media's impact on public perception can be an important tool for identifying and applying further crisis communication strategies.

Additionally, after observing UK and the US cultural features by Cultural Dimensions theory (1980) I concluded that both countries share similar culture's representations on every dimension analysed. Furthermore after an exploration of every dimension and its characteristics I decided to focus the study in the two dimensions. These dimensions are individualism and short-term orientation. These dimensions are important because they share a common and critical feature: the urge of *face* protection.

According to Ting-Toomey for individualistic cultures is essential to maintain a stable self and public-image. Additionally the short-term orientation is also related to *face* protection. Short-term oriented countries tend to be overprotective of their *face* (dignity). Thus in negative situations where they feel uncomfortable they tend to feel threatened and/or attacked. As a consequence they apply, usually unconsciously, a

series of statements and behaviours (*facework*) in order to save their dignity and reduce the impact of a negative situation. In this study I will apply the Cultural Dimensions theory by analysing UK and US through a culture approach. This will demonstrate if the feature of *face* protection previously detected is in fact present in the Deepwater Horizon event.

The Face-Negotiation theory by Stella Ting-Toomey (1985) states that *face* is related to how the individual wants to be perceived by others, its self-image. Furthermore, she affirms that it is usually during a conflict that they negotiate their self-image in order to protect themselves and their identities. In addition, during those self-image negotiations, the tactics used are based on cultural determinations. Both *face* and *facework* are universal; however, the tactics used by each individual are based on cultural determinations. That means that during conflict or unstable environments, countries that have this feature will do everything possible to protect their reputation based on their cultural background. This study represents the collision between two countries, the US and the UK. During conflicts, despite the urge to solve the problem, the US and the UK will tend to protect their own identity towards the other. The Face-Negotiation theory will help understand how UK and US behave in crisis situations and how they applied *facework* in order to save their dignity during the event.

During the literature review, I have noticed that the majority of the current work in intercultural crisis communication is based on organizational strategies' comparison between countries with distinctly different cultures. Despite the visibility of cultural impact in organizational management and the importance of an effective crisis communication response to the reputational risk, only a few studies were found in the field. Studies showed that the range of intercultural communication is vast and new studies need to be conducted in order to develop and build a consistent foundation for communicators and researchers in the field. As a result, a greater importance needs to be given towards the efforts to develop the field of intercultural aspects in crisis communication management.

International public relations strategies and organizational management development depend on the expansion and study of this field. There are many factors that can influence crisis management effectiveness, such as the background and ethnic identity

of a spokesperson and the audience. My study differs from others by observing and comparing two countries with high similarity in their culture. Through the complexity and uniqueness of the case a new paradigm could be constructed in the crisis communication field if verified that similar cultures influence the impact and interpretation of crisis situation.

### **3 Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter is dedicated to discussing the methodology applied, how it was important and why it is relevant to the thesis. First I will analyse the qualitative research and how the study can benefit from this method. Then I will discuss the importance of a case study and how the focus on a single event will help to answer my research question. Furthermore I will define discourse analysis, how the methodology will be applied into my study and the limitations encountered on the way.

The methodology is important since it defines the process that involves the research question and the most effective way to reach the findings. It is considered an important guideline tool for researchers in order to maximize results and determine how the phenomena should be investigated. Therefore the correct use of methodology can define the success and accuracy of the overall work and its findings (Kaplan, 2004).

#### **3.1 Qualitative research**

The method applied in this study was qualitative research. The decision to use qualitative analysis was mainly because the complexity and uniqueness of the case required a deeper understanding of the situation and observation of all aspects involved. As stated by Hoepfl (1997) “unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations” (p. 48).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as an activity that “locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices...turn the world into a series of representations including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic

approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

Qualitative research covers a heterogeneous body of work and different schools of thought. However there are three characteristics regarding qualitative research that is present in most of studies analyzing it: the concept of meaning, the naturalistic context of the messages and the role of the researcher as an interpretative subject (Jensen, 2002: p. 236).

Firstly I will start by analyzing the process of meaning. Meaning is related to social interaction and the synergy of an individuals’ identity. Qualitative research provides information that allows observers to identify the meaning by textual contents, their materiality and social uses (ibid). Therefore the social aspects surrounding the event can provide valuable tools of analysis for researchers. Regarding this study, this is an important tool since the social aspects related to the event are of a major importance in comprehending the material.

In addition in qualitative research the context of the event is evaluated as well-another important research tool in providing relevant information. The inclusion of the context can supply eventual deficiencies that the study could have, which may consequently interfere with the results of the thesis. In this study for instance the data material was gathered through the media coverage perspectives of the two countries. The context here can be perceived as the cultural elements of each country. These elements will be an important source of analysis in order to identify the real meaning embedded in the messages.

Secondly is the naturalistic context that refers to a technique whereby the researcher immerses the material of study into an appropriate cultural perspective. The researcher should be able to see the material without any preconception of her/his own culture or mindset. Therefore the material should be studied in a way that prior conceptions do not interfere with the phenomena’s analysis.

Thirdly is the role of the researcher as an interpretative subject. In contrast to quantitative research, which requires more operational parameters-sometimes even with the help of machines and other individuals, qualitative research depends

uniquely and exclusively on the researcher conducting the case. The same individual is responsible for every process of the study. This allows the researcher to create a stronger connection with the material analyzed. In addition, since the researcher participates in every phase of the study it allows him/her a better analytical understanding of the case.

To sum up quantitative research according to Deacon *et al.* (1999) is an “extremely directive method: it gives answers to the questions you pose” (p. 117). On the other hand, quantitative research will initially segment the study into categories or variables. These categories and variables are first defined by the researcher who decides “what is worth saving, how to divide up the material and how a given incident of talk or behavior relates to other coded items” (Lindlof, 1995: p.219). Furthermore, based on the measurement of these variables the researcher will be able to create a meaningful representation of the text. Lindlof (1995) affirms that the coding process is “integral to the task of interpreting communicative phenomena” (ibid).

That being said and due to the complexity of the case and multiple variables present in the study I affirm that the qualitative research will give me better resources to understand the case. The qualitative method will provide a broader view of the case and include into the context the multiple elements that influenced the event. These elements such as socio, political and cultural aspects are an important step in the process of analyzing and building meaning.

In addition it is worth mentioning that, due the aim of the study, neither fixed variables, nor statistical approach strategies of quantitative studies would provide better results for understanding the case taking into consideration its complexity as a whole. The goal in this case was not generate statistical data, but to understand the interaction, behavior and comportment that the event brought into different cultures sets.

### **3.2 The Case Study Approach**

In this paper I will pursue a single case study in order to answer my research question. The case study can provide valuable insights into a better comprehension of



intercultural crisis management by analyzing cases that are unique and by providing an in-depth observation of the event. In addition intercultural crisis management is related to a complexity of elements involving the case such language, political and economic debates, culture and so on and the case study provide the analyse of all these elements involved on the situation. So in order to understand and observe crisis management from countries that share similar patterns of culture, the case study methodology can help to construct necessary variables and provide a deep understanding of the situation and the context involved.

Some researchers affirm that case studies lack the basic principles of a scientific study owing to generalization and subjectivity. However other papers contradict these former statements affirming that “case studies are likely to produce the best theory” (Walton, 1992: p.129). According to Walton (1992) the case study highlights an important category of subjection in a scientific study, called falsification. Falsification means that if only one study is contrary to the set of results found earlier it could be a reason in itself to invalidate the previous studies.

Therefore this research could make a significant contribution by opening the discussion for a further analysis on the impact of cultural elements on crisis management. If it finds that cultural similarity does not guarantee the same perception towards unstable situations, professionals and researchers in the field must redefine their crisis communication strategies in order to it become more successful.

In this study I intend to observe a single organization, BP. The observation will focus on an accident that occurred at one of BP’s installations which resulted in a massive oil spill-the Deepwater Horizon. The case is peculiar because it involves countries with similar cultural aspects but that seemed to have contradictory interpretations of it.

In this case the aim is deepening understanding of the event itself and comprehending better the multiple complexities surrounding it. The case study method provides the research to fully comprehend the complexity of an event, “coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995). So the decision to observe a case study instead of a comparison between two or more cases was based on the premise that the case itself was unique and provided many elements to consider.

Furthermore it allowed me to study the event as a complex system in its diverse elements and paradigms.

According to Yin & Davis (2007) the use of case study mainly relies in the urge “to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompassed important contextual conditions – because they were highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (cited in Yin, 2008: p.18).

Also according to Yin (2008) there are four important aspects that need to be taken into consideration to achieve quality of research design. They are: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. I will further explain each element separately highlighting how I intend to achieve successfully each one of them in this study.

Firstly I will analyze the construct validity component. Construct validity is related to the use of appropriate operational measurements in order to collect data from the subject of the study (Yin, 2008: p.41). This means that after elaborating the research question, the next crucial step is to define how the material will be collected in order to answer it appropriately. On the other hand if the research question and operational data do not connect in purpose, the findings will not correspond to the initial objective of the study. Therefore construct validity is an important aspect of research design that can influence directly the results of the findings.

In this study I seek to achieve construct validity by selecting information from the literature review and applying it into my study. The initial review of the previous literature in the field guided me to conclude that the media perspective is a legitimate representation of society's representation and that it could be used to capture a society's opinion. So based on this information I then defined my measurement tool as the media coverage of the event. To better understand how each country dealt with the situation I chose one media channel representing each country. So through the media coverage I could understand how each media channel interpreted the event and the impact that cultural aspects brought to the situation.

The second aspect observed is related to the internal validity. The internal validity is present due to the conjunction of several factors that could influence the event studied. It means that inferences regarding the event could lead to incorrect

conclusions (Yin, 2008: p.42). However since this aspect is a main concern only for explanatory studies I will not give much attention into this.

The third mentioned aspect is external validity. This is related to the findings of the study and whether it can be generalized to apply to other cases in similar situations. According to some critics, the external validity plays a major role and is of significant importance for case studies. They affirm that the population sample of the study is too small and restricted to be generalized to a larger universe and if it cannot be generalized then it cannot be considered social science as well (Flyvbjerg, 2006: p. 219).

However according to Flyvbjerg (2006) this should not be accepted as a rule in the social science field. According to him, the case study allows researchers to attain greater discoveries and often the findings of one single case can be responsible for the rejection of an entire predetermined theory (p. 225). This is called falsification and according to Flyvbjerg is considered one of the strictest criteria for evaluating the validity of a study. "If just one observation does not fit with the proposition, it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected" (p. 228).

Additionally as stated by Yin, (2008) "the analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case studies" (p. 43). He affirms that different to surveys that rely on statistical generalization, case studies rely on analytical generalization. This means that the findings of the study could also lead to a contextualized theory through the replication of the findings in further studies.

The objective of this study is to observe if cultural aspects play any impact on crisis' perception. In case the findings indicate that similar cultures perceive crises differently, the subject will gain attention in the field. As a result, more studies would be done to assure the findings and further theories in the field can be contextualized. "A purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process and has often helped cut a path toward scientific innovation. This is not to criticize attempts at formal generalization, for such are essential and effective means of scientific development; rather, it is only to emphasize the limitations, which follow when formal generalization becomes the only legitimate method of scientific inquiry" (Flyvbjerg, 2006: p. 227). Therefore the main

goal of this thesis is not generalization, but observation and exploration of the case with the aim to understanding in depth the situation.

The last element cited is reliability. Reliability means that when another researcher in a similar case situation applies the same operational processes, the findings and conclusions will be the same. Joppe (2000) defines reliability as “the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable” (cited in Golafshani, 2003: p. 598).

According to Yin (2008), “the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (p. 45). Some critics state that reliability is difficult to achieve in case studies due to lack of scientific methods and less rigor involved. Furthermore they affirm that since it allows researcher’s subjectivity into the case, there is more susceptibility to causing bias towards the event.

Nevertheless some authors like Campbell and others affirm that those statements are invalid. According to them, case studies do not have the same type of rigor found in- for instance- quantitative research studies, but they also present their own set of rules. Moreover these rules are much stricter than the ones found in quantitative research studies. Another advantage of case study is “that it can close in on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: p. 235).

Furthermore as stated by Campbell (1975) the data material was responsible for guiding the studies’ direction and not the other way around. This means that previous pre-conceptions, hypotheses and initial assumptions were wrong and needed to be and could be adjusted as the data was collected. As a result he considers incorrect the statement of subjectivity and biases in case studies.

Another relevant aspect proposed by Flyvbjerg (2006) is based on the fact that despite some critics considering the proximity of the researcher to the case a concern aspect, he affirms that this proximity can bring valuable discoveries and is part of an important learning process for social science studies (p. 236). “The proximity to

reality, which the case study entails, and the learning process that it generates for the researcher will often constitute a prerequisite for advanced understanding” (ibid).

On the other hand, some authors do not even consider reliability as an important step to assure quality in case studies that use the qualitative method as an approach. For instance, Stenbacka (2001) argues that the concern over reliability is insignificant for qualitative studies. She states that when it needs to be taken into consideration, then the “consequence is rather that the study is no good” (cited in Golafshani, 2003: p. 601).

Nevertheless I intend to achieve reliability in the thesis by documenting the different processes involved in data collection and analysis. As stated by Yin (2009), “the general way of approaching the reliability problem is to make as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder” (p.45). Therefore I have organized and included the data material of the fifteen days of media coverage analyzed into the written material and also displayed in detail the analysis procedure.

### **3.3 Data Collection/ Procedures**

The data was gathered through the media coverage of two television channels-The BBC and CNN that represent the two countries involved in the situation: The United Kingdom and United States respectively. The data represents the written material found on the online content of both channels. I opted to include two media channels because I noticed through observation of previous studies that this was the structure followed in most cases. For instance studies that were willing to observe crisis communication’s perception of two countries often make this comparison by analyzing the media insight about the event. Nevertheless is important that further studies are conducted with different media channels to verify if the findings are compatible and if they in fact represent US and UK views of the event. Furthermore the media has a greater power of persuasion and affect’s public interpretation of an event (Neuendorf, 2002: p.22). For this study is important because depending on the media’s interpretation of BBC and CNN I can also associate it with the public’s perception of the event in United States and United Kingdom. In addition the media

coverage gave me a broader overview of the case therefore I could include into my analysis contents that were not specifically related to the oil spill but were associated with the case. However it is worth to mention that since my analyse is based in only two media channels it will not give a real representation of the media coverage on those countries.

The articles were gathered online and represent the fifteen days following the accident, from April 22 to May 05 of 2010. I searched for words that connected the articles to the event such *BP, oil spill, Deepwater Horizon, Macondo and Gulf of Mexico*. In total I found 53 articles. Articles that cited one of those previously words mentioned but that did not have any connection to the oil spill were also included into my analysis since they could also represent a statement made by the media channel. For instance citing BP's name but not relating it to the oil spill could means a effort by the media of not connecting the name of the company with the accident. In this case trying to dismiss any responsibility that the company could have had on the spill. It was important to collect these information and include it on my analysis so I could have a holistic view of the event and be aware of contents that were not direct related to the event but which could also interfere on the public's interpretation of it.

I opted to study only the first fifteen days of the spill's media coverage because experts in the crisis communication field affirm that the company's conduct on the beginning of crisis will set the context of the whole event. Additionally how the media portray it at the beginning also impact public's perception of the entire event (Jones, 2005: p.9). Therefore despite the event extended for months the inclusion of the first fifteen days could provide a real sense of the whole event outcome on the media coverage and consequently public's perception.

### **3.4 Data Analysis: Discourse Analysis**

The discourse analysis technique was applied in this research in order to analyze the data. Fairclough (1995) defines discourse any kind of content. It can be spoken or written and it is also be related to other forms of non-verbal communication such gestures and pictures for instance. It is considered the interpretation of a discourse taking into consideration social aspects that interferes in the production of a text.

“...a communicative interaction sets out to show that the semiotic and linguistic features of the interaction are systematically connected with what is going on socially, and what is going on socially is indeed going on partly or wholly semiotically or linguistically. Put differently, discourse analysis systematically charts relations of transformation between the symbolic and non-symbolic, between discourse and the non-discursive” (Fairclough, 1999: p. 113).

Discourse Analysis observes how organizations and individuals utilize language and the role of discourse in social interaction. The content and structure of the message are essential to discourse analysis, however the social and political context to which the message refers also plays an important role in analysis. Therefore the aim of discourse analysis is “to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power” (Fairclough, 1995: p.132).

After collecting the material I divided it into two files representing each media channel. Initially I read through both materials and decided to maintain even the articles that did not directly related to the spill. This decision was based on the discourse analysis aims that emphasizes not only the linguistic aspect of the text, and yet embraces the social context that the text was inserted and the social consequences of its use as well. When analyzing discourse analysis the researcher needs to taken into consideration the hidden meaning behind the journalistic agenda.

Being able to identify the journalistic agenda in the news or what the journalist is trying to persuade trough the news’ content does not necessarily mean that the job of the researcher is done. Discourse analysis is a method that searches for the question behind the conclusion: the “how” is as much important as the “what” itself (Richardson, 2007: p.9). In this study by including contents into my analysis that were not directly related to the spill I also include aspects that were important for the fully understanding of the case and its implications. That way I could have a holistic view of the case and apply efforts to comprehend the situation and the media’s interpretation of it even if the content were not so obvious.

According to Fairclough (2010) there are three semiotic categories detected when analysing discourse in social practice. They are genre, discourse and style (p. 232). The discourse is related to the language used when representing a social sphere by a determined outlook. That means how the content is represented through the text. Genre is the language used to connect with a determined social sphere. It is related to how the discourse itself is being framed. It can be portrayed by interviews, political discourse, and so on and are identified by “the lexical-grammatical features of texts” (Fairclough, 2010: p. 269). And style refers to the value embedded on the content, what is “implicitly committed to by the way the text is written” (Fairclough, 2010: p. 271).

Furthermore according to analyse discourse there are two elements of the analytical focus of Fairclough's three-part model that must be included: the communicative events and the order of discourse. Communicative event is the combination of text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. It encloses the linguistic aspect of the content. The linguistic aspect includes “analysis of vocabulary and semantics, the grammar of sentences and smaller units, and the sound system (phonology) and writing system. But it also includes analysis of textual organization above the sentence, including the way sentences are connected together...” (Fairclough, 2005). Discourse Practice as stated by Fairclough is the relation between text production and text consumption and it can be divided on conventional and creative process.

"Discourse practice straddles the division between society and culture on the one hand, and discourse, language and text on the other" (p. 60). Furthermore he states “conventional discourse practice is realized in a text which is relatively homogeneous in its forms and meanings, whereas a creative discourse practice is realized in a text which is relatively heterogeneous in its forms and meanings” (Fairclough, 2005).

Finally, the order of discourse as reported by Fairclough it is the conjunction between genre and discourse, how this relation evolves on the text. They are complementary so they need to be taken into consideration in any kind of discourse analysis.

After the data collection I read the material for the second time and highlighted important considerations on the content that encompassed the event. It includes BP's actions towards it, political and economical statements and environmental and financial consequences of the event. I also considered linguistic elements found in the



text such as inclusion of direct and/or indirect notes, how the headline was structured, the words used of each media to describe the event, the inclusion of experts' reports and the presence of positive/negative words relating to the case. According to Fairclough (1995b) and Fowler (1991) the use of direct or indirect quotes represents the dependence of the media to maintain status and remain productivity. Thus in this study if observed it could characterizes the social relation between the media and its audience.

I also included contents that repeat even if they did not represent any direct connection to the event. For instance a priori the comparison between the Deepwater Horizon and previous spill/environmental disaster did not gather my attention. However after constant repetition of those comparisons I saw the need to analyse it trough a broader context.

In discourse analysis the media text production it is also considered an important element of media dimension and its social practices. One of the relevant aspects to analyse text production is by observing the selection of news reports. This means what the media channel considers worth publishing. According to Carruthers (2000) and Eaman (1987) newsworthiness "is not an inherent characteristic of events and news items. It is rather determined by the news production and institutional practices" (Sheyholislami, 2001: p.11).

The discourse analysis method is mainly based on "the interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this; situate what is written or said in the context in which it occurs, rather than just summarizing patterns or regularities in texts..." (Richardson, 2007: p.15).

The content of the material through the linguistic analysis will be essential to understand the case. Furthermore the social aspects involving the event such as political, economic and historical aspects surrounding the UK and US will also be included into analyze. They are vital to fully comprehending the dynamic of the case and should be analyzed as a whole. Discourse analysis provides opportunities to observe these several elements together and based on that create a meaningful message from the text.

### 3.5 Limitations

There are few limitations regarding the methodology approach that was faced in this study. The first limitation refers to the sample material. The study, as previously mentioned, had its data collected fifteen days following the accident despite the event itself lasting several months-when the leak was finally controlled by BP. However I opted to analyze the first fifteen days because as stated by experts in the crisis communication field the media coverage of early stages of a crisis impacts the public's perception of the entire event. It means that if the early media's portrayal of a crisis mainly covers the event through a negative prospect even if the company changes its strategy afterwards it will remain difficult to gain public's support.

In this case the aim of the study was to analyse media's interpretation of the spill in order to comprehend how the general public could be influenced by it. The initial coverage of the event gave me a real sense of how the reader shaped their opinion regarding the event and therefore it was in accordance with the goal of the study. However it would be valuable if different periods of time of the event were also included so the study would have a broader view of media's interpretation.

The second limitation refers to the source of my data. I opted to analyse two television channels and the data material was gathered through their online written material. The study could have gained a new perspective if I also had considered other information's source provided by those media channels such as video and pictures. That way I would have other parameters of comparison and more information to base my study.

Another limitation faced is related to the choice of the media channels. BBC and CNN are good representative examples of news media in the UK and US due to their influence and great reach in society (Hawkins, 2002). They are international news television with powerful influence on public's opinion worldwide. In addition they are considered an important source of information and have a crucial responsibility informing citizens (Zoltán, 1999). However there are other types of media that could have been included in the study as well. For instance television or radio broadcasts could have given other perspectives and viewpoints of the case. Additionally other

news media could also have provided other aspects that the BBC and CNN had not debated in their articles.

Finally, the last limitation results from the research design. The qualitative research gave me the opportunity to observe the case through a broad perspective. It also provided me with the understanding of the whole context in which the event occurred. Since the variables were unidentified and chosen after analysis of the material, qualitative research was the most applicable method for this study. Nevertheless the study would benefit from the inclusion of complementary research methods as well. That is, with the inclusion of another measurement instrument, the study would offer more elements for comparison and the resulting evidence would improve the reliability.

As intercultural crisis communication is considered a relatively new area, more studies in the field can definitely be a great inspiration to providing an open debate and theory contextualization in the field. As a conclusion, further studies in those directions can complement the results of this thesis, contributing further to this particular line of study and consequently benefiting the whole communication field as well.

## **4 Chapter 4: Analysis**

In this chapter I intend to present the collected data to the reader and demonstrates how the analysis was conducted. Initially I will review the background of the event in order to have a better understanding of the accident and observe if there was any interference by the countries analysed. To understand the complexity of the case in any crisis situation, it is important to comprehend the different aspects surrounding the event (Ray: 1999, 10). Therefore I will also observe the case itself and the events surrounding it in order to have a broader view of the situation.

Then the data will be analysed through discourse analysis method. I will present the data in a narrative outlook in order to give the reader a real sense of the media coverage of it. The data is represented in chronological order so the reader can be informed of the event through a logical sequence of the facts Furthermore the data will be analysed in the light of the theories presented in chapter 2 in order to answer if cultural similarities play an important aspect during crisis.

### **4.1 Scenario of the event**

BP had been the operator of the Macondo well since 2008, when it acquired a 10 year – lease to the Mississippi Canyon Block 252, where the Macondo well was located. BP holds a 65% interest on the Prospect, Anadarko 25% and MOEX 2010 holds 10% (SubseaIQ, 2012). The Macondo well was part of the Deepwater Horizon, a semi-submersible drilling, especially designed to operate in deep waters (Deepwater Horizon Investigation Report).

The Deepwater Horizon was built in 2001 and valued at more than \$560 million (“Timeline-Gulf ”, 2010). In the year before the accident the US Interior Department carried three environmental reviews of the area and concluded that an oil spill of greater magnitude was unlikely to happen (Eilperin, J., 2010). As a result, the US Minerals Management Service (MMS), a federal US agency which regulates offshore

drilling, listed BP as a "categorical exclusion". In other words, they excluded BP from being fully reviewed on the basis of an environmental analysis usually required under the National Environmental Policy Act (Jones & Mason, 2010). They had claimed that “the chances of a blowout were less than one percent, and that even if one did happen, it wouldn't release much oil” (Bourne, 2010).

In the picture below it is possible to identify the exactly location of the well and its proximity with the American coastline.

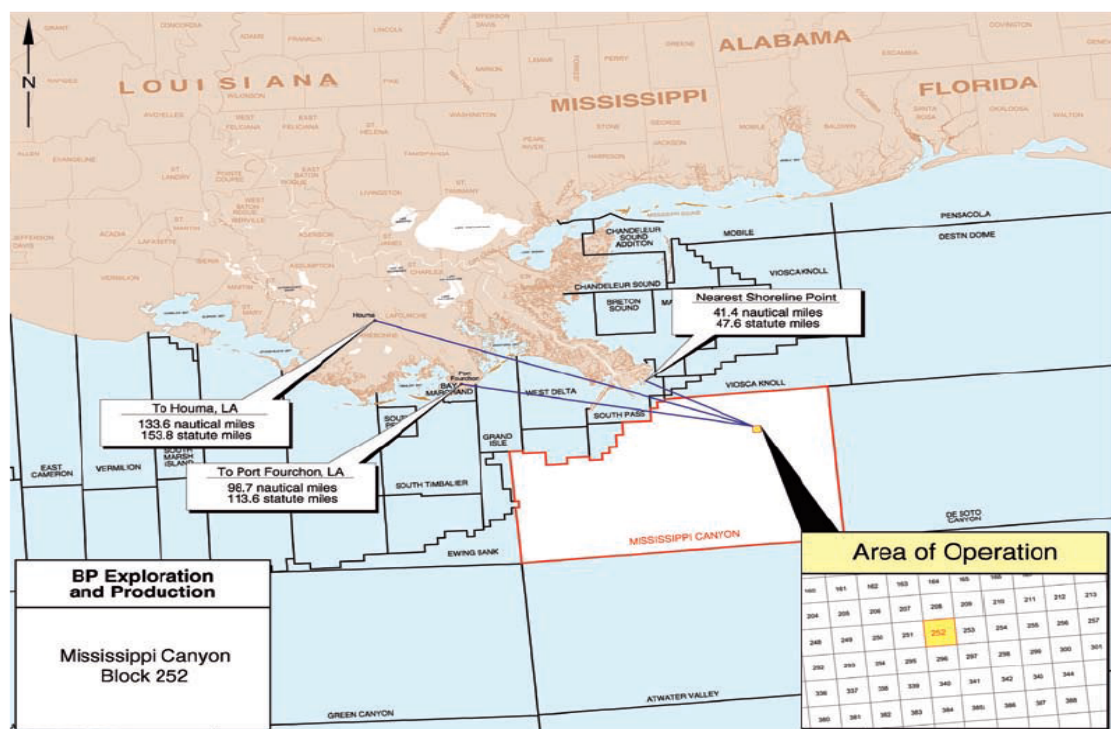


Figure 3: Deepwater Horizon's location

Source: BP's Deepwater Horizon Accident Investigation Report

In May 2010 the New York Times published an article stating that according to BP's internal documents the company had been dealing with problems in the well casing and the blowout preventer on the Macondo Prospect months before the explosion occurred. It is important to point out that the well casing and the blowout preventer were considered (if not operating) the main critical pieces of equipment that lead to the explosion on the rig.

Transocean, a Swiss-based company, was hired by BP to drill the well. The first rig was completely destroyed by Hurricane Ida, only one month after completion. The Deepwater Horizon started producing oil in February 2010 and it faced several problems from the beginning. A week before the explosion, a BP drilling engineer wrote: “This has been [a] nightmare well” (Bourne, 2010).

#### 4.1.2 Overview of the event

The event happened in the evening of April 20, 2010 in the Macondo Prospect, The Gulf of Mexico, United States. It occurred due to a control problem on a gas leak which caused hydrocarbons to escape from the well and lead to an explosion followed by a fire on the rig. One hundred and fifteen employees survived, eleven were reported missing and approximately seventeen others were injured (Deepwater Horizon Investigation Report).

On April 22 the well sunk in 5,000ft of water and the US National Response Team began its search and rescue operations. On the following day the US Coast Guard suspended the search for missing workers, who were all presumed dead (“BP oil spill timeline”, 2010). On April 24 they found oil to be leaking from the well. It was discovered later that day that three different points were leaking oil. The following day, operations by BP and the US Coast Guard began to try to stop the leak by activating a blowout preventer. Unfortunately however, the first attempt failed (“Timeline – Gulf”, 2010).

On April 28 the US Coast Guard stated that the amount of oil leaking due to the explosion was five times the previously expected. The US then declared the spill as a “national significance” (“US military joins”, 2010). On the following day Louisiana’s Governor declared “a state of emergency” since the oil was approaching the coastal area (Macalister, T., 2010). On May 1 it was announced by the US Coast Guard that the spill would reach the Gulf shore. Therefore, the US government decided to ban fishing in the area for approximately ten days initially.

On May 5 BP was able to contain one of the three leaks by capping a valve but the amount of oil spilling out could not be controlled. On May 26 in an attempt to stop the other two leaks BP inserted heavy drilling mud in the affected area, called “top kill”. However three days later BP announced that the attempt had also failed (“Timeline BP oil spill”, 2010).

The event had massive coverage in the international media and a greater impact on the general public. The event brought consequences outside US territory and impacted negatively on the whole industry. For instance countries like Norway temporarily banned new deep-water oil drilling in its territory (“Gulf of Mexico oil spill”, 2011). In addition it also impacted the industry as a whole causing regulations’ change and financial effect for the whole sector (Kurahone & Lewis, 2010).

BP’s former CEO, Tony Hayward, commented the event. During an interview he claimed that the “the amount of volume of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume”. Furthermore, a few days later he posted in the social media channel Facebook that he would like his life back (Goldenberg, 2010). The media promptly transformed and reported his declarations as BP’s attitude of disrespect and negligence towards victims, family’s victims and everyone directly and indirectly affected by the event. Tony Hayward also affirmed that the spill’s impact would be “very modest” (Mason, R., 2010).

Critics contested the sincerity of the apologies made by BP and its responsibility’s role in the event. In early June in US territory, BP launched a television ad campaign and print ads in newspapers such The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today and The Washington Post. The ads were BP’s attempt to apologize for the event and take full responsibility for the clean-up costs. Estimates suggest that BP spent around \$50 million on this campaign (Smith, 2010). The campaign did not work as BP planned. Instead of building a positive image it brought more distrust and questioning of how well BP was managing its financial resources.

President Barack Obama sent a clear message stating the US government’s position “...I want BP to be very clear they’ve got moral and legal obligations here in the Gulf for the damage that has been done. And what I don’t want to hear is, when they’re

spending that kind of money on their shareholders, and spending that kind of money on TV advertising, that they're nickel-and-diming fisherman or small businesses here in the Gulf who are having a hard time" (Cooper, 2010).

At the end of July BP announced that Tony Hayward would be replaced by Bob Dudley (Heaven, 2010). Tony Hayward remained in the company as the non-executive director of its Russian joint venture, TNK-BP. The leak was finally capped on September. The amount of oil spilled in Gulf of Mexico was approximately 205.8 million gallons (Achenbach & Fahrenthold, 2010). Two years later the hearing process is still ongoing. The 100,000 plus claims made by people and businesses blaming BP for the event could lead to a \$13bn settlement charge to BP (Gosden, 2012).

#### **4.1.3 USA and UK Involvement**

The first statement given by the US government occurred three days following the accident. The White House press secretary Robert Gibbs affirmed that he doubted that this BP oil spill accident would be the last of this magnitude to happen ("BP oil spill timeline", 2010). April 29 was the first time that US President commented on the event. He stated that the US would use every resource available to contain the leak, even if necessary the US military. In addition he also declared that BP was responsible for the cleanup (ibid).

Critics accused the US Government of acting slowly on the necessary procedures regarding the explosion: "The Federal Government also had opportunities to move more quickly, but did not do so while it waited for a resolution to the spreading spill from BP" (Robertson & Lipton, 2010). The US Homeland Security Department replied saying that the delay was due to the US trying to respond accordingly and in an attempt to assure they had the necessary tools to stop the leak.

On April 30 the President of United States, Barack Obama, announced that no further drilling offshore would be allowed in the country until the cause of the Deepwater Horizon accident had been solved ("BP oil spill timeline", 2010). This decision



involved not only BP but the whole oil industry with operations in US territory. Besides pressure from the general public concerned about the environmental impact of the event, BP also had to deal with pressure from other organizations connected to the event who were concerned about the impact on their own operations.

President Barack Obama visited the affected area for the first time in mid-June. The US Government then launched an aggressive campaign in order to show they were in control and coping accordingly with public demands (“Barack Obama”, 2010). Two days later the US Congress required that BP executives faced a closed session at White House in an attempt to gather information about possible causes surrounding the event.

The US Senate proposed increasing the organization’s liability payouts from \$75m to \$10bn for the cost of the cleanup (“BP oil spill timeline”, 2010). The meeting at Congress increased tensions when BP announced that if the leak continued, the amount of oil leaking into the ocean could be eight times more than the initial estimate, reaching 40,000 barrels a day (Goldenberg & Pilkington, 2010).

After BP announced that one leak had been shut down, the US government reacted with distrust. They stated that this information should be confirmed before informing the general public. They implied that BP was not a trustworthy organization and that the US government should check its actions closely. At the same time the US government was suffering pressure from American society, demanding explanations as to why the US government had not taken enough measures to prevent the event, or for anticipating the environmental catastrophe (Goldenberg, 2010).

The situation worsened during the Energy and Natural Resources Senate Committee hearing with the companies involved in the event: BP, Transocean and Halliburton. The companies did not achieve a consensus and blamed each other for the accident (“Gulf oil spill hearing”, 2010). President Barack Obama accused the companies of being part of a “ridiculous spectacle” (“Timeline BP oil spill”, 2010). In the beginning of June, the US government decided to open criminal investigations regarding the spill in order to closely analyze the companies involved in the event and punish them if they found any negligence (“Gulf oil spill”, 2010).

President Obama showed discontentment towards BP's CEO, Tony Hayward, after the declarations made by him when he said he would like his life back and the amount of oil leaking was tiny compared with the size of the ocean. During an interview, Obama affirmed that he would have fired Hayward if he was working for him (Goldenberg, S., 2010).

On the other hand, British critics pointed out that the USA was being quite strict and somewhat unfair towards BP regarding the situation. In the article published by The Telegraph, President Obama's war on BP is a war against the UK, Toby Young affirmed that BP is financially important to the UK and if something happens to the company, the United Kingdom and its citizens would suffer the consequences (Young, T., 2010). He also makes a comparison between the Macondo oil spill and the Piper Alpha oil rig explosion which occurred in the UK North Sea in 1988.

The Piper Alpha was operated by the Occidental Petroleum Ltd, an American organization located in California, and the accident is considered "the world's worst offshore disaster" with 167 deaths (Duff, 2010). Toby Young affirmed that when the same situation happened in the UK, the British government reacted fairly: "Is it really necessary for President Obama to rain blow after blow down on this beleaguered company? After all, Margaret Thatcher didn't succumb to knee-jerk jingoism after the American-owned Piper Alpha oil rig exploded in the North Sea in 1988, killing 167 people. If BP goes under as a result of Obama's tub-thumping populism the already tattered Special Relationship will never recover" (Young, T., 2010).

Furthermore, during an interview, President Barack Obama called BP by its previous name, British Petroleum instead of BP. Some critics have accused Obama of "anti-British" language, saying that United Kingdom as whole identity was being blamed ("US increases pressure on BP", 2010).

On the other hand, the English Prime Minister, David Cameron, defended a fair punishment towards the company, saying that charges should not exceed a considered fair amount. He also highlighted BP's importance to the UK. According to him "BP is

an important company. It is an important company for people's pensions, it employs thousands of people in the UK, it pays a lot of tax. It's important to try to give some level of clarity and certainty so that the company can actually continue and be financially stable. They do need a level of certainty, and this is BP's worry, that there won't be claims entertained that are three or four times removed from the oil spill. This shouldn't be about going after BP for the sake of it" ("Oil spill: David Cameron", 2010).

As a result, it is possible to observe contrasting perceptions of the significance of the event and-BP's degree of culpability-between the United Kingdom and the United States at a public and political level. While for the US, it represented BP's negligence towards American territory, for the United Kingdom, the punishment was neither fair nor reasonable. Furthermore, on several occasions, the US authorities linked BP's responsibility to the country where the company originates-the United Kingdom. At the same time the UK made sure to demonstrate the case as an isolated event that could happen with any company in any part of the world.

## 4.2 Analysis

I wanted to understand the level of importance that the BBC and CNN contributed to the event itself. The level of public debate correlates to the degree of relevance that each country gives to the event. After a comparison of the number of articles released by the media, I observed that CNN included the event more in its content than the BBC (see graph below).

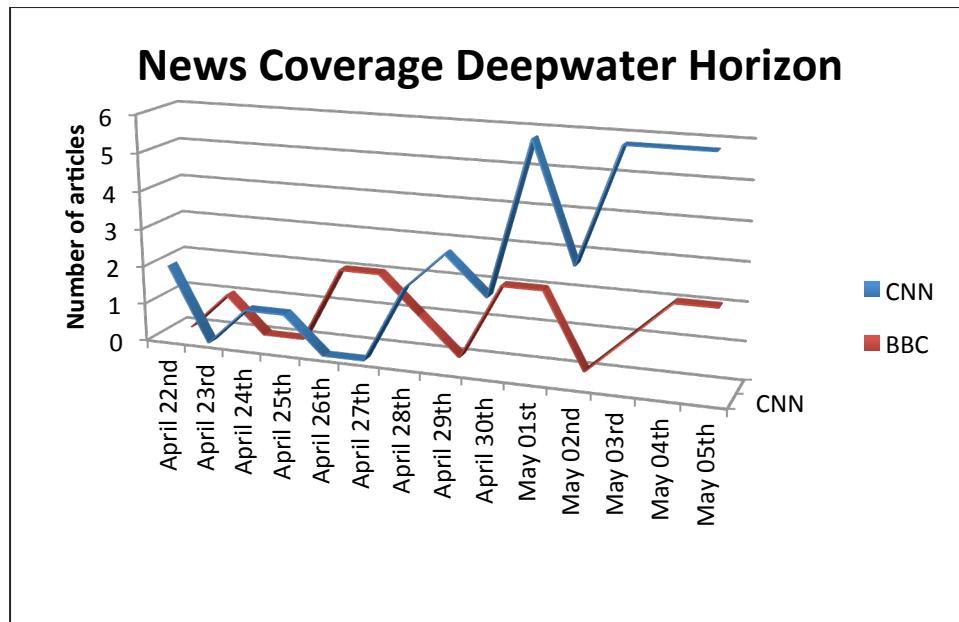


Figure 4: News coverage Deepwater Horizon

Yeomans & Tench (2009) stated that the media influence a crisis situation by the amount of attention it gives to the issue. The visibility of the case will lead to an inclusion of the content in a public debate of the matter (p. 367). In addition according to John Richardson (2007) a story must be appealing to the target audience in order to become news. Therefore based on the importance of the event given by each media company, I can infer the level of importance that it had for each audience, in this case British and American.

So through the data I compared the number of articles published by each broadcaster. After the analysis I found out that while the BBC published fifteen articles, CNN published thirty-eight. Thus CNN had more influence of the case by providing greater coverage of the spill. As a result for US society the crisis had more visibility and importance. Furthermore the oil spill, considered a negative event, was a determining factor in the approach of CNN. Through observation of Cultural Dimension theory (1980) I verified that both countries present the same characteristic of identity protection when facing crisis. In this case the need of each country to protect their image towards others influenced the attention given to the event. So in order to protect the image of the country the best approach was that of attack.

This combined with the content of the articles, which I will discuss further, meant CNN adopted a defense mechanism based on attracting the attention of the audience and at the same time dismissing any responsibility of the US regarding the oil spill. On the other hand, the BBC-as a defense mechanism-covered the event less and consequently gave it less importance. In this way the event had lower priority and the public would not be much affected by it and their dignity not damaged. In the following paragraphs I will analyse factors that could influence the newsworthiness context of the story and why it seemed more attractive to CNN.

In addition I noticed that both media channels combined official and colloquial discourses into their news. As stated by Fairclough (1995) this combination on news story is viewed as relatively stable and recognizable due to the change of the journalism parameter nowadays. Furthermore as demonstrated previously I noticed a constant use of the mixing genre, especially in CNN's articles. The mixing genre is the combination of informative and persuasive elements in the same text. CNN constantly used it by relating the spill with other aspects such political discourse and previous oil spill events. By connecting the Deepwater Horizon with political discourse for instance the media was persuading readers to open up a debate for the implementation of new regulations and policies in the US energy sector. Also by comparing it with previous oil spill's accidents CNN was again through persuasion reinforcing the environmental and financial risks of oil drilling in the country.

BBC also used this resource however it was less predominant in its text. For instance the media channel informed the reader about the spill but at the same time included information about the benefits that BP brings to British economy. It was persuading the reader to dismiss the negative impact that the spill had by transferring the attention to how much the company financially benefited the UK.

In addition by analysing the context of the event I notice important elements that denoted the representation that the event had based on cultural aspects. For instance I observed that a couple of months after the spill occurred BP's spokesperson, and CEO, Tony Hayward a British national, was replaced by Bob Dudley, an American. According to Arpan (2002) there is a greater influence of a spokesperson's ethnicity and the credibility of the message by the public. Individuals who perceive ideological similarities with the spokesperson tend to have a significant effect on

credibility ratings. This may also be directly related to the country that the spokesperson is associated. A US congressman Anthony Weiner, during a live broadcast, affirmed: "Here's a viewers guide to BP media briefings. Whenever you hear someone with a British accent talking about this on behalf on British petroleum, they are NOT telling you the truth" (Heaven, W., 2010). Thus by analysing the Deepwater Horizon and the information related to the event I observed that cultural elements had an important role in the events' path.

The first article released by CNN indicated that the cause of the accident was still unsure and that a terrorist incident was not yet ruled out. Furthermore it stated that lawsuits were being issued against BP and Transocean. The claims mainly alleged negligence by the companies involved. Transocean made immediate apologies and affirmed that the company's efforts were being directed to the family and victims of the accident. BP opted to not comment and the company's approach was to focus on further actions to prevent a major environmental impact. CNN included testimonials of survivors on the platform and how they were dealing with the situation. Furthermore in order to define the accident CNN included emotive and strong phrases regarding the spill such as "catastrophic explosion", "catastrophic event", "and massive fire". Those impactful words are used to attract the attention of the public and to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation.

BBC released its first article regarding the Deepwater Horizon two days after the blast. The media reinforced BP's actions towards the spill, affirming that the company was doing everything possible to contain the spill. The article also made reference to a previous accident in which BP was involved at Texas City Refinery in 2009. The accident led to 15 fatalities and BP was considered guilty due to safety negligence at the time. However in the following paragraph BBC stated that this time BP was probably not responsible for the accident since recent routine inspections had not indicated any safety concern. As indicated BBC was not critical towards BP, it softens the guilt that the company could have on the event.

On April 26<sup>th</sup> BBC released an article referring to the accident as "U.S spill" and "Gulf of Mexico oil leak". Therefore according to the BBC there was not direct connection between the spill and BP and the accident appeared as a concern that only

involved US territory. In addition the article affirmed that the oil leaking had the potential to cause major environment destruction. Moreover the BBC indicated that under US law, BP was responsible for the cleanup (“Robot vessels”, 2010). Implying that BP was not responsible for the accident and was paying only because of legal requirements. In addition the article mentioned some previous global oil spill disasters. As a way of BBC showing that accidents involving the oil industry happen constantly all over the world. Furthermore there were mentions of BP’s efforts. Here it is interesting to note the subtle softening of the event by the BBC by affirming the common nature of oil accidents by giving real examples of accidents that have happened globally and BP’s effort to stop the current leak.

On April 27<sup>th</sup> BBC released an article that was related to BP’s profits. The article affirmed that BP’s profits had doubled since last year due to general global economic recovery. The article demonstrated that despite the accident involving BP in the US, the company still played a major role in the British economy. Furthermore the article indicated that with the improving weather conditions, the cleanup would probably accelerate. The article showed a degree of optimism by BP: “This, combined with the light thin oil we are dealing with has further increased our confidence that we can tackle this spill offshore” (Tony Hayward, BP’s CEO). This article is another attempt by BBC to dismiss any responsibility of BP on the event and also reinforce the financially benefits that the company brings to UK.

On April 28<sup>th</sup> CNN highlighted the debate over offshore drilling in the US. The debate put in perspective the economic advantages of offshore drilling and the real risk of an environmental disaster that it could bring. CNN used strong language to refer to the accident. For instance it cited the oil spill as “potentially one of the worst environmental disasters in history”, “most serious oil spills in U.S. history”, “potential to be a disaster”, “we’ve never had anything of this magnitude” and “this is going to be unbelievable”. Furthermore the article indicated major actions that were being considered in order to stop the leak: “Coast Guard officials are even considering setting the massive 80 mile oil slick on fire to try and contain some of the damage and prevent the crude oil from spreading” (“Should there be a full ban”, 2010). Here it is important to mention that the fact that drastic measures were being considered demonstrates that according to the American government, BP had no control over the incident and was not well prepared for the situation. Moreover, a

political debate relating to the American President, Barack Obama, and his campaign actions was introduced. The article mentioned that the accident happened only one week after President Obama declared his intentions to open some parts of United States to oil and gas drilling.

Additionally there is an interesting comparison between the oil spill accident and Hurricane Katrina which happened in 2005 in the same area. CNN compared the oil spill with Hurricane Katrina and stated that the impact of the spill could be similar or even worse than Hurricane Katrina. It is worth mentioning that Hurricane Katrina devastated the region and is considered “one of the strongest storms to impact the coast of the United States during the last 100 years”, with 2,000 people killed (Report: NOAA Satellite and Information Service, 2005).

Highlighting the Cultural Dimension and Face-Negotiation theories I perceived several elements that demonstrated the urge of both countries to protect their self-image. CNN used as resource attacking and blaming BP for the event’s responsibility. The first element that demonstrates CNN’s attempt to attack the event was by building an emotional attachment between the event itself and the readers. According to Coombs & Holladay (2010) there are several factors that can influence a company’s reputational threat in the public sphere and the media. First is the degree of public emotion involved in relation to the topic. Some issues tend to have more impact based on a high emotional attachment that they represent to society (p. 436). To do so CNN often compared the Deepwater Horizon with Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina reached the coast of the Gulf of Mexico (the same area affected by the spill) in 2005. It impacted heavily on American society due to its extensive environmental damage in the area and the number of victims affected. More than 1,500 people died and other thousands were directly and indirectly affected by the disaster (“Surviving Katrina”).

CNN used Katrina as a form of comparison and projection of what the spill could represent to society. In addition, in several passages there is a clear indication by CNN that the consequences of the oil spill could easily surpass those of Hurricane Katrina. According to Wenger (1985) the media uses this resource of exaggeration and negative projection of disasters to make it more dramatic and to attract society’s attention to the issue. Therefore the combination of the two events gives the oil spill



an even greater impact. Not affirming that the spill itself was not severe, but instead comparing it with an event of huge societal impact, Katrina, it was implied by CNN that the spill would reach similar or bigger proportions. CNN was in some ways projecting the impact that the spill would have despite the uncertainties surrounding them.

In addition there are the psychological and emotional components that the Hurricane represents for American society. The hurricane's impact was massive and mobilized the whole country. Therefore the association of both events could also have helped the reader to connect the negative feelings of sadness and indignation of one event to another. For instance the negative emotions associated with Katrina such as sadness, anger and revolt would be associated with the oil spill. According to the Face-Negotiation theory (1985) when individuals have a negative experience related to a social context that implies feelings of embarrassment, shame, awkwardness and others, they tend to feel attacked and/or provoked. As a consequence they feel the need to restore or save their dignity (*face*). Therefore the American public have even more reasons to blame the event, in this case BP and the UK, for the Gulf oil spill.

CNN also quoted residents blaming BP for its actions and response. They affirmed that BP did not stop the leak and the company lied about it. "It's unreal they haven't even stopped yet. At first they were telling us it's not even leaking" (Matt S., 2010). In CNN's content there were several indications that BP was financially responsible for stopping the leak and the cleanup operation. And since BP's efforts to stop the leak were unsuccessful the disappointment towards BP was manifested several times. Furthermore CNN reinforced the environmental impact that the region could suffer. "Worse yet, the spill is happening at a time when Gulf shrimp are in their spawning season. That puts more pressure on fishermen already feeling the pinch from high fuel prices, increased imports and a late spring" (ibid).

At the same day BBC released one article mentioning BP. Here it is important to note the contrast in content between the BBC and CNN's content. The BBC article relates to an annual painting award to promote BP in the United Kingdom. It mentioned the high number of enrolled participants and record number of portraits selected for exhibition at a gallery. The article also reinforced the importance of the event and BP's sponsorship. There is a direct quotation of the director of the National Portrait

Gallery saying: “The 2010 BP is another outstanding year for the quality of the entries and the range of styles. I am grateful to all the artists who submitted and to BP for their continuing support” (“Deathbed portrait up for BP award”, 2010). In this article BBC reinforced the social assistance that the company brings to the UK. In previous article the media already inferred about the financial benefits of the company to society, now it also highlighted programs sponsored by BP that aimed to develop society in a cultural aspect.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> CNN reinforced the imminence of the oil reaching the US coast. Furthermore it said that the US government was pressuring BP and sending representatives to inspect BP’s actions. Analyzing this, there is a clear statement that according to the US Government, BP was not doing enough to contain and stop the leak. Therefore BP’s efforts were put into question.

There was a paragraph mentioning that there was some achievement regarding the oil recovery, however BP was not mentioned. The efforts were given to the US Government: “Officials from a handful of federal agencies have recovered more than 18,000 barrels of an oil-water mix” (“Oil slick just a few miles”, 2010). In the following paragraph it was confirmed by the Department of Homeland Security the size of the workforce employed in attempting to stop the oil. Again, it is clear that BP’s efforts were not being mentioned therefore there was an intention to minimize BP’s actions. It implies that BP was considered guilty from a US perspective and was doing little while the victims, US citizens, were the ones really taking responsibility for the situation.

CNN quoted a resident that used the word “heroic” to represent citizens and the US taskforce working on the event. CNN reinforced BP’s responsibility for the event: “Under the 1990 oil pollution act, passed in the wake of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska, the company is required to foot the bill for the cleanup” (ibid). In an interview President Obama even considered using the Department of Defense to address the accident. “...my administration will continue to use every single available resource at our disposal – including, potentially, the Department of Defense – to address the incident” (ibid). By publishing a statement of President Obama’s affirming that every resource available would be used to address the incident accordingly, even if it was necessary for the intervention of the Department of

Defense, it implies the country was facing a war situation, where BP was viewed as the enemy. According to the US Department of Defense's website, the mission of the department is strictly to "provide the military forces needed to deter war and to protect the security of our country" (U.S Department of Defense).

The secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, declared the spill as "a crisis of national significance". Another illustration that BP was portrayed as the 'enemy' was when the Coast Guard Rear Adm., Mary Landry, affirmed that it might be necessary to gather resources from across the US: "if BP does not request these resources, I can and I will" ("Oil slick just a few miles", 2010). These statements established BP as a company that was not working hard on the matter.

As stated by the Face-Negotiation theory during conflicts the main aspect used to build a positive self-image is by maintaining a national identity. In this case CNN used this resource by focusing and relating the event to a war. There was also an inclusion of President Obama's statement affirming that every resource would be used in order to stop the leak even if necessary the intervention of the Department of Defense-a military department tasked with protecting the security of the country and preventing war (U.S Department of Defense). Here the message portrayed was that the country was facing a formidable enemy-the spill and everything it represented.

On April 30<sup>th</sup> CNN issued an article focusing on the apparent conflict between BP and the US government. Firstly it stated that society needed to be prepared for the worst. Then it reinforced the pressure that the US Government was directing towards BP. The term used by CNN was that the government was "pushing BP to beef up its response" ("Jackson says EPA", 2010). Again, the discourse here involves a difference of interests between BP and the US. It seems that BP was not doing enough regarding the accident and if not for US governmental pressure, the company would be doing even less. At one point US government accuses BP of not responding appropriately to the situation as it developed. "I don't think it was ever a question of trust in the company, I think it was a question of responding to the set of facts as we came to understand them" (Lisa Jackson, EPA administrator). According to the article there was no doubt that BP was legally responsible to cover the costs of the spill.

The BBC mentioned the impact that the accident had on BP's image and referred to it as a "headache". Furthermore it affirmed that the event was not the first time that BP faced "controversy and anger" in US territory. It then made a reference to the explosion in 2005 at the refinery in south Houston, which killed 15 people and left 170 injured. The article also claimed that the accident could be considered "the oil industry's biggest disaster in history" ("Obama pledges", 2010). However it tried to take full blame off BP when it highlighted experts considering Transocean also guilty.

The discourse shows BP wrongly accused of being the only responsible party. According to the BBC, BP faced the situation correctly and BP's CEO, Tony Hayward, "was quick to grasp the gravity of the situation" ("BP faces choppy waters", 2010). In addition there was a quote from Tony Hayward saying that the company was being very aggressive in dealing with the situation. "This is the biggest response by anyone in the industry ever, and we're able to do it because we planned for it. We'll be judged by our response" (Tony Hayward). According to the BBC, there was a concern about the company's brand and its reputation: "It can have a major impact on brand, and it can damage a brand in the long term..." (Stephen Cheliotis, the Centre for Brand Analysis in London). Cheliotis also added that the accident happened at a bad time for BP's brand, the week that BP would announce its profits. Another expert affirmed that the event could also have a negative impact on the whole industry, but BP would be the most affected. "If the brand responds in the wrong way, it may be that long-term damage will be done to their ability to influence governments, NGOs and regulators" (Tom Zara, brand consultancy Interbrand). The BBC then commented saying that despite the correct response applied by BP, the company would still suffer reputational damage due to previous negative events in US.

Moreover through data analysis I observed the reinforcement of US identity and nationalism through CNN's content. In some articles there is an indirect message that the nation needed to protect the country against a common enemy, the spill. For instance analyzing one of the quotes from Louisiana's Governor, Bobby Jindal, I notice an excessive use of possessive pronouns "our". "The oil is leaking offshore, the oil that is coming onto **our** coast threatens more than just **our** wildlife, **our** fisheries, **our** coast, this oil literally threatens **our** way of life" (Brune, M., 2010). The discourse represented here was BP harming the US territory. Additionally it gives the

sense of nation, identity. As if the whole country, not only a territory, was being harmed.

I also noticed the use of strong adjectives combined with emotional content. For instance CNN explained the consequences of the accident using phrases such as: “devastate the precious ecosystem and hurt struggling businesses” (Hornick, E., 2010). Furthermore it compared the oil spill to the Katrina Hurricane occurred in 2005. The article exposed that some people believed President Obama’s attitude towards the accident was the same as the Bush Administration to Hurricane Katrina. Moreover CNN mentioned the Exxon Valdez accident in 1989 saying that the current spill could surpass the accident in Alaska.

CNN also portrayed the efforts that US government and American citizens were making to control the spill. This can be perceived as a characteristic of literary nonfiction also used by CNN by display heroic acts and/or heroes. In this case the heroes were either American citizens or the American Government. It illustrated that 6,000 National Guard troops were requested to help with the cleanup. The article mentioned that the US government was financially supporting something they should not have to, therefore they expected to receive the money back. “...because the spill is BP’s responsibility we do expect to be reimbursed” (Geoff Morrel, Defense Department spokesman). Moreover, the efforts by the government and citizens in an attempt to stop the oil were also seen as essential through the articles. CNN stated the importance of the assistance of the US Government. Another mentioning that the U.S government was doing a big part of the job: “A handful of federal agencies have recovered more than 20,200 barrels of oily water” (“Feds raise pressure”, 2010).

Here I can observe an aspect of new journalism included in the CNN articles by the insertion of heroes and heroic acts. New Journalism is considered the inclusion of literature elements into news to capture the attention of the reader and giving elements of association between the story and the reader’s culture background (Hartsock, 2000). Furthermore according to Emile Durkheim the presence of heroic figures, especially during crisis, reinforces collective identity. Additionally analyzing the data I observed that the heroes portrayed by CNN were basically the American society, either represented by the volunteers or the American government. Therefore heroes portrayed by CNN can be considered as a reinforcement of the US national

identity against the event itself-the oil spill. In this case the oil spill is represented by BP, a British organization.

The Face-Negotiation theory states that during conflicts there are many aspects that are negotiated. However the main battle is to maintain an identity and build a positive self-image (Kim, Young Yun & Gudykunst, 1988: p. 213). US identity was also reinforced by the inclusion of statements that promoted collectivism by demonstrating that the consequences would be felt across the nation.

In another article CNN highlighted BP's failure to deal with the event. CNN explained the intended actions of BP. It stated that if those options did not work, then BP could be left out of options. Simultaneously BP was trying to reach experts, even from rival companies, "to see whether they have other ideas to stop the leaks" (Hanna, J., 2010). It again portrayed BP as unprepared and without control over the situation. CNN also explained the communication gap between the volunteers, U.S government and BP. It used words like "extremely frustrating" to illustrate the discrepancy and lack of planning. According to CNN, despite many volunteers assigned to help with the cleanup, they were not being fully availed due a lack of planning between authorities and BP. On the other hand, BP affirmed they were "working fervently to match volunteers to communities based on need and expertise" (Johnson, C., 2010). In addition the article analyzed the economic consequences of the spill, especially for the seafood industry. The article portrayed BP as having no control of the situation. It claimed that if BP did not have the help of volunteers or the US government, the situation could have become even worse.

I also noticed a strong and critical statement towards BP. Only at the end of the article was it specified that the "opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Michael Brune", an executive director of the Sierra Club and former director of the Rainforest Action Network. However until the end of the article it appeared to be CNN's official view of the event. In addition, despite not being CNN's official line, its inclusion suggests that they approved the content and wished to present this view. The writer made several references to the US nation against an enemy (BP). It used possession pronouns specifying "we" and "our". For instance: "The oil disaster plaguing the Gulf of Mexico and our coastal states puts our desperate need". Furthermore it referred to BP as dirty, dangerous and deadly. "We need to move away

from dirty, dangerous and deadly energy sources” (Brune, M., 2010). It stated that the US government must be “aggressive” towards the danger of offshore drilling, which needed be banned as soon as possible. Furthermore the writer explained the dangers that offshore drilling could bring to society and she used an emotional style for that: “We’ve seen workers tragically killed. We’ve seen our ocean lit on fire, and now we’re watching hundreds of thousands of gallons of toxic oil seep toward wetlands and wildlife habitat” (ibid).

Moreover CNN gave merit to the US government, affirming that they had handled it well. According to CNN, the consequences of the spill could not yet be measured. It is interesting to note that CNN invited representatives to comment about the accident, but none of them was from BP. The representatives were from the US government and unanimously considered BP legally responsible for the incident. They also stated that the US reacted quickly and appropriately to the accident. Once more it showed that BP did not have control of the situation and did not act quickly as expected. As reported by Janet Napolitano, US Interior Secretary “while BP was the first responder, the Coast Guard reacted right away to the situation and deployed 70 vessels and 1 million feet of bottom for possible service” (“Officials warn of potential”, 2010). It shows that while BP was acting slowly, US officials were already taking control of the situation. The officials also accused BP of providing inaccurate information. “...it appeared that much of the early information provided to the federal government by BP had been either inaccurate or shortcoming” (Marco Rubio, Florida’s Republican Senate candidate).

There is also a comparison between the Deepwater Horizon and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The article referred to the spill as possibly worse than the Exxon Valdez oil spill. It is considered a relevant aspect the constant comparison by CNN between the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the Exxon Valdez oil spill which happened in 1989 in Alaska. The Exxon organization was considered responsible for the spill and its image heavily damaged. The event, until 2010, was considered “the worst that had occurred up to that point in American history” (“Exxon Valdez Oil Spill”, 2010). However on several occasions CNN referred to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill as having the “potential to become one of the worst in U.S. history”. I found constant comparison between the event in the Gulf of Mexico and the spill that happened in

1989 in Alaska. CNN repeatedly affirmed that the spill in the Gulf of Mexico could rival the one that happened in Alaska.

It reveals another relevant topic that demonstrated the need of regulations' changes in the energy sector in United States by the constant comparison by CNN between the Deepwater Horizon and Exxon Valdez oil spill. Here it is important to understand the context of Exxon Valdez spill and the consequences and impact that it had in America. In this way I could comprehend the dimensions that the previous spill had had and what the Deepwater Horizon event currently represents to society. After some research of the Exxon Valdez spill I concluded that the event had massive coverage in the media and had a huge public impact in the United States. After the spill some policies were implemented and regulations became stricter. As a direct result of the event and "largely in response to rising public concern following the Exxon Valdez incident" U.S Congress decreed in 1990 the Oil Pollution Act (OPA). "OPA improved the nation's ability to prevent and respond to oil spills by establishing provisions that expand the federal government's ability, and provide the money and resources necessary, to respond to oil spills" (U.S Environmental Protection Agency). The Exxon Valdez spill, due to its magnitude, is considered a negative reference of an environmental disaster. The repercussions of the event had an immediate public impact and great coverage in the mass media. Furthermore, it facilitated the reshaping of policy in the energy sector in the United States.

The connection between both disasters by CNN brought a new paradigm to the Deepwater Horizon event. Since the Exxon Valdez spill demonstrated the vulnerability of the energy sector practices and highlighted the importance of reshaping the policy in the US, through comparison the same concerns could be transferred to the current spill. In addition CNN reinforced this by constantly framing a critical viewpoint towards Obama's administration and the urge to develop the current policy in the energy sector.

On May 03<sup>rd</sup> CNN reinforced the impact that the spill could bring to the region. Environmental scientists explained the consequences of the spill. They revealed that the environment could be compromised for decades. A biologist from University of Houston used the expression "in extreme danger" to refer the risks of the spill for the environment (Almasy, S., 2010). According to CNN the spill in the Gulf of Mexico



could possibly surpass the environmental impact of the Exxon Valdez spill. It is important to note here that the article is basically based on expert's opinion and numbers, a combination to reinforce the veracity of the statement.

Moreover the article, "Could oil spill sap appetite for Obama's offshore drilling plans" was based on a political debate. It accused the government of being "dependent on foreign oil". The political debate was related to offshore drilling and critics were questioning the US government's priorities. President Obama replied to the critics saying that oil and natural gas drilling is important for the country and creates opportunities. The government said that despite the spill in the Gulf of Mexico they were planning starting to lease some areas of the coasts of Virginia, Alaska and possibly Florida for drilling. CNN explained that offshore drilling in the US was banned in 1980 "when mounting public pressure pushed lawmakers into action". It was after an accident in California in 1969 which "grew into a broader environmental movement, which eventually forced a drilling moratorium". CNN then added: "But as the environmental impact of the Gulf of Mexico spill comes ashore, the appetite for Obama's offshore drilling plan and the enthusiasm from administration officials appear to have subsided" (Keck, K., 2010).

Discourse Practice as stated by Fairclough (2005) is the relation between text production and text consumption and it can be divided on conventional and creative process. I observed CNN implementing a creative discourse process by mixing informative and persuasive messages at the same time. For instance I observed that CNN used the event as a platform for debating issues related to political, economic and ethical organizational policies towards the oil industry. These issues gained more attention after an unsuccessful attempt to stop the leak by BP a few days after the blast. CNN then included articles questioning the offshore drilling policy in the US and whether it should be banned or not.

Furthermore CNN stated that the event could easily happen again and referred to the offshore drilling technique as "one of the many dangers of offshore drilling". The article published on May 01<sup>st</sup> also leads the audience to debate the banning of offshore drilling. As CNN concluded: "We are pleased that the White House is now saying it will suspend any new offshore drilling...there should be no doubt left that drilling will only harm our coasts and the people who live there". The article then

continued: “Taking a temporary break from offshore drilling is an important step, but it’s not enough. We need to stop new offshore drilling for good, now” (Brune, M., 2010).

On the same day CNN released another article questioning President Obama’s policy regarding offshore drilling and its dangers. The article pointed out that Obama had an important role in the event affirming that “seeds of political fallout for the Obama administration are beginning to sprout” (Hornick, E., 2010). There was even an indirect attempt to blame Obama for the spill. “In early April, Obama announced plans to pursue the expansion of oil drilling off the nation’s coasts, a plan that received praise by Republicans and other administration critics. Now with the oil leaking at a high rate, Obama’s critics are once again calling on him to kill offshore drilling” (ibid). In another article it was inferred that Obama’s actions increased the possibilities of the accident happening: “This disaster is only weeks after President Obama announced that he would open up parts of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean to oil and natural gas drilling” (“Should there be a full ban”, 2010).

On May 04<sup>th</sup> the media again discussed the future of offshore drilling in the US. CNN stated that some senators were against it. “Democratic senators from two coastal states Tuesday called on President Barack Obama to reverse his call for expanded offshore oil exploration after a massive spill from a damaged well in the Gulf of Mexico” (“Florida senator”, 2010). Furthermore CNN quoted one of Senators’ disapproval: “I will make it short and to the point. The president’s proposal for offshore drilling is dead on arrival” (Bill Nelson, 2010).

So after analyzing the data I noticed strong criticism of President Obama and his offshore drilling policy in CNN’s content: “New offshore drilling in U.S waters has been banned since the early 1980s, when mounting public pressure pushed lawmakers into action. But as the environmental impact of the Gulf Coast spill comes ashore, the appetite for Obama’s offshore drilling plan and the enthusiasm from administration officials appear to have subsided” (Keck, K., 2010). In one of the articles there is also a reference that the US is “dependent on foreign oil” (ibid). Therefore CNN used the event to reinforce its political views towards offshore drilling in the US.

According to Coombs & Holladay (2001) organizations that do not have a strong social corporate responsibility are more susceptible to face public opinion during

crisis. Additionally one of the topics that suffer most influence in the public sphere is relate to policy regulations and political demand. The goal is to provide a debate in society in order to reformulate policies, change regulations and/or reshape business models.

Analysing the data I observed that CNN included political matters in its content associated with the Deepwater Horizon. For instance I detected paragraphs that discussed the government's response towards the spill, the current energy sector legislation in the US and how the regulations could evolve after the event. In doing so the medium highlighted and focussed the society's attention on the importance of opening up a dialogue to discuss the current energy policy in the US and the critical points that need to be addressed in the near future according to their own political stance.

As a result it demonstrates the urge of modification that the energy regulation have in US territory and how it outlined the social and political debate in the country. In addition it points out the fragility of BP reputation in the US and its lack of perceived corporate social responsibility.

Furthermore CNN focused on residents of the area and the impact that the spill would bring to their lives. It is embedded with greater emotional elements through the testimonials of residents and victims of the accident. The article increased the sense of an emotional attachment saying that most of the residents dealing with the accident were already victims of the Hurricane Katrina a few years before. The articles used real stories to illustrate the impact of the spill: "Equipment operator Daniel Schepens knows all too well what that will mean. After Katrina he was out of work for a month. He is worried the fallout from the spill could be worse" ("Watch-and-wait game", 2010).

On May 04<sup>th</sup> CNN used narrative language and linked the oil spill with a Hollywood movie: "It sounds like a Hollywood movie. An impending disaster – think of the disabled spacecraft in 'Apollo 13' or the asteroid hurtling toward Earth in 'Armageddon' – prompts a daring intervention by engineers to save the day" (Todd, B., 2010). A relevant aspect I noticed was again the implementation of new journalistic elements. For instance when CNN published an article comparing the oil

spill to a Hollywood movie the news lost its objectivity. It however built a connection between the content itself and the readers by the use of a cultural symbol of significance.

As reported by Hofstede (1976) individuals that share the same nationality tend to perceive the same social environment similarly. This is important because it builds a meaningful message to the reader by correlating with the social context that he/she is inserted. CNN used this resource by comparing the oil spill event with a Hollywood movie. The message gained a new connection with the American reader by associating the spill with a symbol of American society-Hollywood movie productions. It is also worth to mention that this association is based on movies that bring a tragic outlook to American society by representing destruction and catastrophe. In this case according to the Face-Negotiation and Cultural Dimension theories CNN applied its *facework* in order to build a connection with the American audience reinforcing the negative aspect of the event.

The article, “Gulf Coast residents brace for slow-motion oil disaster” also used a narrative approach. “With every passing hour and passing day, the oil spill continues to grow and affect the ecosystem on the Gulf Coast”. The article affirmed that the negative consequences were not even known yet by the public, meaning the situation could get even worse: “...the impact is just beginning to unfold”. In addition they added the real story of people affected by the spill: “I got \$3 million worth boats sitting here. What am I going to do with them?” (Capt. Louis Skrmetta).

At the same day CNN released another article explaining how BP got the license to explore oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico. First it said that back in 2008 BP had to compete with “dozens of energy companies” for the Gulf of Mexico license (Boulden, J., 2010). BP won the license after entering a bid of \$336 million. Therefore the company got the right to explore the area, including the Macondo prospect well, the area where happened the accident. According to CNN, the area became of greater value for BP due its importance in oil and gas extraction. In addition BP alleged that some of its operations in the Gulf of Mexico were inspected in 2009 and awarded the District Safety Award for Excellence (SAFE). The discourse portrayed by CNN showed BP in a good financial position, however when facing crisis the company seemed not to be prepared to deal with it in a responsible manner.

In another article CNN debated the similarities faced by Obama during the oil spill and Bush's Government during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. According to CNN, critics were claiming that Obama's administration did not act quickly regarding the accident. Some people referred to the accident as "Obama's Hurricane Katrina" (Hornick, E., 2010). During Hurricane Katrina, the Bush Administration suffered negative image impact due to a lack of communication response planning. The article demonstrated that other American newspapers were also agreeing with this. For instance the Palm Beach Post: "Obama acted way too much like George Bush after Katrina" and The Washington Examiner headline: "Gulf oil spill becoming Obama's Katrina: a timeline of presidential delay".

Despite Katrina and the spill being distinct events with different causes and consequences, it was implied by CNN that they were in many ways related. Katrina reached the US coast in 2005 and it is considered the "third deadliest hurricane to strike the United States" (Blake & Gibney, 2011). The region affected, the central Gulf of Mexico, was the same area affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. However the events had a distinct cause: the hurricane was caused by a natural disaster while the oil spill was caused by a technical problem. Also the consequences were divergent. For instance the hurricane was a massive human tragedy with more than 1,500 deaths while the oil spill caused eleven fatalities. Both events caused massive environmental destruction in the region, but more than that there is no direct relation between them ("Surviving Katrina").

However CNN approached them mainly through political comparison. Observing the articles I noticed there is a constant comparison between the US government responses in both cases. I also searched for more information about Katrina and I found that when it happened the President in charge, George W. Bush, was widely accused of lack of preparation to deal with the situation. Critics alleged that the government's actions were slow and inaccurate (Shane, S., 2005).

CNN also published a few articles stating that Obama's administration did not cope appropriately towards the spill. Also the consequences of both events were compared, implying that the outline of the oil spill could be worse than Katrina. "...oil damaging sensitive coastal wetlands and industries, including a vital fishing sector that was damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005" ("Obama vows", 2010). "Equipment operator

Daniel Schepens knows all too well what that will mean. After Katrina, he was out of work for a month. He is worried the fallout from the spill could be worse” (“Watch-and-wait game”, 2010).

The article, “Florida Senator: Obama drilling plan dead on arrival” reassumed the discussion surrounding the proposal of offshore drilling in the US by Obama’s administration. The article stated that some senators were against the expansion proposal and intended to veto it. CNN also illustrated the discussion regarding current legislation which defines the amount of money that companies must pay to cover accidents. According to the article oil, companies must pay \$75million but US senators were willing to raise it to \$10billion. Furthermore they claimed that an organization with greater profits like BP could pay the highest amount for the spill, including into this the loss of tourism revenue for the region. Despite BP affirming the company was willing to pay, U.S senators stated: “They’re not going to pay any more than what the law says they have to, which is why we can’t let them off the hook” (Bill Nelson, Democrat Senator).

The BBC ran with “BP shares hit seven-month low after oil spill” The article related to the decrease of BP’s share value of more than 20% since the accident. According to the BBC, BP admitted financial responsibility for the accident; however, the company did not accept the blame for it. BP alleged that the accident was caused by failed equipment owned by Transocean. The article explains US legislation regarding offshore drilling and why BP was requested to pay for it. “Under US law it is the oilfield operator that has financial responsibility, even if fault lies with a contractor”. Here the discourse portrayed by BBC is that BP was paying for the accident’s costs even if the company was not the one responsible for causing it.

BBC indicated that BP was responsible for the incident “under [U.S] federal law”. It raised the question that if the incident had happened in another country would BP still be considered responsible for it? The BBC implied through its articles that BP might not be the only one considered financial responsibility for the spill. Also it highlighted the economic importance of BP, especially for Britain. In an article released on April 27th it demonstrated the company’s financial importance to UK and also showed optimism towards the event and BP’s actions. On May 04<sup>th</sup> an article demonstrated the decrease in BP’s profit due to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The message implied that the company was already paying financially for the oil spill so it deserved some compassion. Furthermore the article published on April 28<sup>th</sup> told of the art award annually sponsored by BP. It highlighted the importance of the event and the benefits that it brings to society. At no point was the spill mentioned and how it could affect the company.

Furthermore, the article stated that there was some chance for BP to “pursue Transocean at a later stage to try to get some money back”. Therefore BBC demonstrates that BP should not be the only one paying for everything related to the accident. According to a BBC statement, sharing the expenses would be fair. Furthermore, the BBC also affirmed that there was a concern relating to the company’s damaged image, especially in the US. “Analysts say the main damage could be to the company’s reputation in the U.S, which has yet to recover from a refinery accident in Texas and pipeline problems in Alaska. The fall in BP’s shares is largely to do with investors’ fears that the reputational damage may undermine BP’s ability to do business in the US, its most important market”. Here it is interesting to note that at any time the BBC commented on the possible reputational damage of BP globally, it suggested this would be largely limited to within the US.

On May 5<sup>th</sup> CNN released the article: “Greed negligence behind BP oil spill”, like a previous one, only informed the reader at the end that the article expressed the opinions of the author. Examining the article I noticed the use of strong adjectives directed towards BP. The writer accused BP of being a greedy organization. Furthermore there was an interview with a local resident where she exposed her fears and worries regarding the spill. The resident mentioned Hurricane Katrina: “I spent a restless night, worrying that another man-made disaster might devastate my beloved hometown” (Katrina’s survivor, New Orleans resident). In addition, CNN continued referring to the spill as “BP’s oil spill”. Here I identified an important aspect that clearly denotes the difference each news channel covered the event. According to the Face-Negotiation theory it demonstrates a noticeable denotation of protecting their self-image by accusing the other. It is based on how the BBC and CNN referred to the event itself. For instance CNN usually referred to it as “BP’s oil spill”, therefore CNN was directly connecting BP’s name to the spill. In this way, the reader would easily associate the spill with BP. On the other hand, the BBC usually referred to the event as “U.S spill” or “Gulf of Mexico spill”. In this case the heading limited the event to

American territory, and did not connect it directly to BP. And if there is no involvement there is also no responsibility involved. So, the BBC did not make any association whatsoever between the spill and England/the UK or even BP. In fact it referred to it as only part of the American territory.

It is a relevant finding as it clarifies how each news channel perceived the event. It also implied the culpability that the event had for the BBC and CNN. While the BBC implied no full responsibility with BP towards the event by not associating the name of the company to the event, CNN indirectly blamed BP as the one responsible by connecting its name with the event itself.

Additionally according to CNN, some experts were blaming BP for lacking options and calling the chemical dispersant as “BP’s unique idea” (Hellerman, C., 2010). CNN also included an expert’s opinions saying that the method could cause environmental damage. Additionally there was a statement accusing BP of using it because the chemical dispersants would give the erroneous impression that the oil had disappeared.

Another element used by CNN to reinforce its message was by the inclusion of feature style into its articles. The feature style tends to reinforce the message by focusing the news on people and issues (Fox, 2001: p.125). One way of doing it is by inclusion of direct quotes on the news. According to some authors, the inclusion of direct quotes enhances the liveliness of the story and provides a more realistic and dramatic report of the story (Jacobs, 1999). It will consequently give the story a vivid element and therefore generate more impact on/response from the audience.

Observing the CNN articles I noticed the inclusion of direct quotation especially from experts in environmental disasters and testimonials of the victims affected by the spill. The experts were reinforcing the environmental damage and negative impact of the spill on the environment. Furthermore the victim’s testimonials were also involved in relating the impact that the event brought to their daily lives, affecting them emotionally and also financially.

So CNN, through feature style, reinforced the spill’s negative impact both for the environment and for society. It emphasized the harmful aspect of the event by connecting it emotionally to the reader by making the event more real and dramatic to



society. Here I can perceive the Face-Negotiation theory being applied where CNN's *facework* is established on attacking BP by reinforcing the emotional connection between reader and the story. On the other hand BBC's articles did not present elements of feature style that could reinforce the drama and liveliness of the event. So the BBC readership had a 'lighter' version of the story compared to CNN's audience. In this case BBC's *facework* was established by not reinforcing negative aspects of the event and not emphasizing dramatized liveliness's aspects of it to its audience.

In another article released at the same day by CNN related to donations provided by BP when Barack Obama was running for President in 2008 ("Obama was top recipient", 2010). It affirmed that Obama's campaign collected \$71,000 of BP donations. According to CNN, the White House was questioned about the donations and the relationship between Obama and BP. Furthermore the article implied that BP spent a large amount of money lobbying US Congress. So the discourse implied by CNN is BP's large financial capacity and the strong relationship between the company and the US Congress. Also in the article; "White House backs lifting liability limit for oil spills" we are informed of the current law in the US regarding environmental accidents involving the oil industry. The legislation requires companies to cover economic loss up to \$75 million. However, according to CNN, US Congress proposed an increase in the ceiling, raising it to \$10 billion. Moreover, the legislation change might be retroactive, meaning that BP would be affected by it.

On the other hand BBC's article ("Funnel plan", 2010) referred to the equipment used by BP in an attempt to stop the leak. The article confirmed that the equipment would be used for the first time therefore BP was not sure about its efficacy. "There are no guarantees. We'll undoubtedly encounter some issues as we go through that process" (Tony Hayward, BP's CEO). The BBC stated that BP's costs could rise to \$15 billion however the company continued to refute responsibility for the incident. BP affirmed that the rig's contractor, Transocean, should be blamed. Again, the article explained why BP had to pay for it, even if the company was not considered guilty. "Under the U.S law, it has to bear the cost of the clean-up as the operator of the oilfield". The BBC explained the technical challenges faced by BP but that the company was showing confidence over this..."we will keep trying other options until something does work. I think we have some great engineers and they have worked very hard" (John Curry, BP's spokesman). Furthermore the article debated the US pressure

directed at BP and the possible conflicted relationship between the company and the US administration. However according to the BBC, during an interview BP's CEO denied any rumours relating to this. He alleged that an 'incredible co-operative relationship' had been established with the federal authorities" (Tony Hayward).

In another article released the same day BBC focuses on the reduced consequences for the environment. "No populated areas are expected to be affected by the controlled burn operations and there are no anticipated impacts to marine mammals and sea turtles" ("BP seals off first Gulf oil leak", 2010). In addition when the BBC explained the causes of the accident it did not mention BP's name: "The spill was set off by an explosion that destroyed the Deepwater Horizon oil rig and killed 11 workers off Louisiana last month".

### 4.3 Summary of Analysis

Through analysis of the data combined with Cultural Dimensions and Face-Negotiation theories I noticed relevant information related to the Deepwater Horizon coverage. According to the Cultural Dimension theory UK and US share many cultural similarities. As stated by Hofstede in every cultural dimension observed the countries present similar characteristics. Furthermore observing in detail how these characteristics evolve and what they represent I identified a common element considered critical during conflicts situations: both countries urge to protect their *faces* (identity) during conflicts.

Moreover the Face-Negotiation theory (1985) guided me to understand how the self-image protection (*face*) applied during crisis. According to Stella Ting-Toomey how an individual or a group will behave during crisis will be directly interfered by the cultural background. In addition she affirms that the face protection will be negotiable in order to maintain the self-image intact. That means that during conflict or unstable environments countries that have this feature will do everything possible to protect their reputation based on their cultural background. In this case for UK and US the event evolving the oil spill represented a battle to protect theirs reputation. This was identified through discourse analysis of the media coverage between CNN and BCC.

The discourse analysis provided elements to understand the articles through a broader view. Besides linguistic elements I also analysed the social context embedded on the news. As a result I observed the constant implementation of mixing genres especially in CNN's content. As stated by Fairclough the mixing genre is the combination of informative and persuasive content at the same time. For instance in CNN's article there was, besides informative aspects related to the spill, also a constant inclusion of social and political debates related to the event. The connection between the oil spill and political discourses was based on the demand of implementation of new policies regarding the offshore drilling in US. Thus CNN was persuading its audience to embark a debate in the energy sector in US. In BBC's articles the mixing genre was less predominant, however also present. By informing the reader about the spill and the benefits that BP brings to UK at the same time, BBC was persuading the reader of not giving much relevance to the spill and yet to focus on what the company financially represents to the country.

I identified several differences in how the story was portrayed by each media broadcaster. That means that despite the event being the same there were differences in the way they were reported. Those differences were due to the fact they present similar cultural characteristics. Furthermore as identified by the discourse analysis those differences varied from language used, content to narrative structure.

The first element that demonstrates CNN's attempt to attack the event was by building an emotional attachment between the event itself and the readers. To do so CNN often compared the Deepwater Horizon and Hurricane Katrina. CNN used Katrina as a form of comparison and projection of what the spill could symbolize to American society.

In addition, in several articles I noticed an indication by CNN that the consequences of the oil spill could exceed Hurricane Katrina. Usually the media uses this resource of crisis' comparison in order to make it more dramatic and attract society's attention to the event (Wenger, 1985). As a result comparing the two events gives the Deepwater Horizon a greater visibility. Also Hurricane Katrina has psychological and emotionally impact for American society. Thus by associating both events could also have provided reader the connection of the negative feelings of Hurricane Katrina to the Deepwater Horizon. In this case the negative emotions associated with Katrina

such as sadness, anger and revolt would be related with the oil spill. According to the Face-Negotiation theory (1985) when individuals have a negative experience they tend to feel attacked and/or provoked. As a consequence they see the urge to protect or save their dignity (*face*). That means that the American audience received more information regarding the spill aimed to blame the event, in this case BP and the UK, for the Gulf oil spill.

The second element used by CNN was the inclusion of feature style into its articles by including direct quotes. The use of direct quotes can provide a more realistic perspective and drama to the story (Whitaker et al., 2009). As a consequence it also generates more impact and response from the audience. I observed that CNN included quotation especially from experts in environmental disasters and testimonials of the victims affected by the spill. The experts were reinforcing the environmental damage and negative impact of the spill on the environment. Furthermore the victim's testimonials were also involved in relating the impact that the event brought to their daily lives, affecting them emotionally and also financially. So CNN used feature style to reinforce the spill's negative impact both for the environment and for society. It emphasized the harmful aspect of the event by connecting it emotionally to the reader by making the event more real and dramatic to society.

Additionally CNN also included New Journalism features. According to Hartsock (2000) this literary component provides the news to lose its subjectivity and converting it into a cultural symbol of representation. CNN used this resource by comparing the oil spill event with a Hollywood movie. "It sounds like a Hollywood movie. An impending disaster – think the disabled spacecraft in 'Apollo 13' or the asteroid hurtling toward Earth in 'Armageddon' – prompts a daring intervention by engineers to save the day" (Todd, B., 2010). The message gained a new connection with the American reader by associating the spill with a symbol of American society-Hollywood movie productions.

It is also worth to mention that this association is based on movies which stories affected US in a negative way, representing destruction, catastrophe and failure. This connection with the audience is essential since it builds a meaningful context to the audience by associating with a cultural symbol belonged to an environment where the reader is inserted. Therefore for the American audience associating the oil spill with

stories that, despite not real, symbolizes negative aspects makes the spill more real and emphasizes the negative feelings that the event brings.

Another aspect of new journalism included in the CNN articles was the insertion of heroes and heroic acts. According to Emile Durkheim the presence of heroes, especially during crisis, can promote collective identity. Furthermore the Face-Negotiation theory emphasizes the need to maintain an identity during crisis in order to build a positive self-image. Therefore the promotion of heroes by CNN can be considered as a reinforcement of the US national identity against the event itself, the oil spill. In this case represented by BP.

Another identity reinforcement portrayed by CNN was the inclusion of statements demonstrating that the consequences would be perceived all over US. In addition, the statement of President Obama affirming that if necessary the Department of Defense would be used to intervene on the case portrayed that the country facing a formidable enemy-the spill and everything it represented.

Lastly I identified an important aspect that clearly denotes the difference each news channel covered the event. According to the Face-Negotiation theory it demonstrates a clear statement of protecting their self-image by accusing the other. It is established on how the media channels mentioned the oil spill. For instance BBC referred to the event as “Gulf of Mexico oil spill” or “US spill”, while CNN mentioned it as “BP’s oil spill”. So while BBC did not make any association whatsoever between the spill and England/The UK or even BP, CNN connected the spill to BP’s name.

It is a significant finding as it elucidates how BBC and CNN perceived the event. It also implied the culpability that the event had for the BBC and CNN. While the BBC inferred no full responsibility of BP with the spill by not associating the name of the company to the event, CNN indirectly blamed BP as the one responsible by connecting its name with the event itself.

Therefore by covering the same topic through a different perspective they also portrayed the event differently. They utilized different writing styles which could have impacted the audience in different ways. While CNN included journalistic elements and feature styles that influence the proximity and liveliness of the event, the BBC concentrated its efforts on broadcasting the story from a more objective

perspective. According to the theories applied those differences are due to the need of each country to protect their own reputation by maintaining a respectable self-image towards others.

## 5 Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this chapter I intend to highlight the conclusion of the study and the importance of the theories applied into the findings. Based on the findings I will analyse if the research question was properly addressed and the benefits it can bring to the crisis communication field. Furthermore I will review the limitations I faced during the whole process and how it may impact the final results. Last I will discuss further aspects for future studies in the area in order to complement this study and develop the crisis communication field.

### 5.1 Answering research question – the role of culture in crisis communication

*Do news media organizations in countries that share similar culture perceive crisis in the same way?*

The findings of this study indicate that similar cultures can perceive the same conflict situation differently. Analysing through discourse analysis the media coverage of UK (BBC) and US (CNN) I identified elements that demonstrates that the event was being portrayed differently.

The Cultural Dimensions theory (1980) confirmed that both countries share cultural similarities. I observed that both countries present similarities in every dimension observed. In order to deepen my understanding of these similarities I also analyzed in detail what these dimensions represented. And one aspect that attracted my attention was that the same characteristic was present in two of the dimensions. This characteristic was related to self-presentation and protection of the *face*. This means that when countries that present these characteristics face crisis or unstable situations, they tend to be overprotective of their image and appearance of dignity to others.

Attracted by the interest of this new discovery, I searched for more information about the impact that *face* has in crisis situations. As a result, the Face-Negotiation theory

by Stella Ting-Toomey (1994), guided me to a deeper appreciation of events involving *face*. It provided clarification on how the protection of the *face* occurs in conflicts and its relationship with culture. According to this theory, culture's values are transmitted through generations. In addition they are responsible for guiding individuals to behave accordingly with the group's rules during conflicts. The accepted behavior is only legitimized if there is the consensus of the group. As a result, the individual's mechanisms to cope with the conflict situation are based on the culture in which the individual is inserted.

Applying the theories to the Deepwater Horizon, we appreciate the defense mechanisms adopted by the US and UK during the oil spill. This means that both countries, due to their cultural characteristics previously mentioned, applied their strategies in order to protect their *faces* and dignity towards others. In this case it means that it was not enough to solve the conflict alone, but to leave the situation not being blamed or considered guilty.

For instance I identified that CNN's approach was attack. So the media channel used linguistic tools that included involving the reader emotionally through a negative outlook of the event. This happened by comparing it with previous events (e.g. Exxon Valdez oil spill, Hurricane Katrina) that had a significantly negative impact on American society. CNN also connected the reader to the event by including victims and experts' testimonials to reinforce the negative impact the spill had on the US in the present day and in the long-term. Furthermore CNN promoted and reinforced the identity of US by the inclusion of American citizens portrayed as heroes. Therefore CNN used resources that jointly attacked BP for the tragedy and exalted the US as a victim and survivor of the event.

On the other hand BBC did not cover the event as thoroughly as compared to CNN. The media channel defence was to not bring into the debate issues related to the event and maintaining the coverage as objectively as possible. It did this by relating mainly to the facts and BP's efforts to stop the leak. Also in several occasions BBC framed the importance of BP to the UK by reinforcing its economical and social contribution to the country. Furthermore an important aspect that identifies how the theories were related to data was by how each country denominated the event. For instance BBC



mainly referred to it as “Gulf of Mexico oil spill” or “US spill”, while CNN mentioned it as “BP’s oil spill”. Thus for BBC the event was specifically concerned to the US territory and for CNN it was directly linked to the organization responsible for the spill, BP. Thus it is worth mentioning that the culpability that each media channel portrayed to the event corresponded to how they referred to it. CNN blamed BP by correlating the spill with the organization and BBC dismissed any responsibility of BP by linking the spill with the US.

As a result I conclude that with both countries presenting the same cultural characteristics observed on Hofstede’s theory played a major factor on the interpretation of the event. That means that the cultural similarities instead of making the situation manageable caused more conflicts and misunderstandings. For instance the fact that the UK and US present the urge of *face* protection when they face the same conflict the main goal is to try and save their own identity more than resolve the conflict itself. As a result it could be the reason of an endless negotiation period causing more stress and increasing their divergences in the situation. Additionally the Face-Negotiation Theory provided me the opportunity to observe the divergent strategies applied (*facework*) by each media channel in order to protect their own identity and reputation. Those *faceworks* were represented by how each media decided to cover the event and it is related to the cultural background of each country.

### **5.1.1 Conclusive Comments on the Findings**

According to the findings it is essential that organizations do not underestimate the importance of cultural differences. Despite some experts in the field stated that crisis within similar cultures are easy to manage guided by the theories I confirmed that was not the case and that similar cultures pose their own complications Organizations that are willing to engage its publics in an effective manner must comprehend publics’ values such as behaviour, expectancies, language and main interests. Nevertheless since those values are shaped by cultural forces culture plays an important role to the communication field. This topic requires a greater consideration and importance to the area since communication and culture are considered inseparable (Smith, 1966: p. 7).

Specially nowadays with globalization and the Internet growing mobilization it allows even more cultural interaction. According to Hall (1977) “there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture” and that is why is so important to understand and incorporate it into communication strategies (p. 14).

In addition new technologies provide innovative communication systems and modify the way organizations interact with publics. For instance new platforms of social media transformed the dynamic of people’s interaction and how businesses engaged to it in order to gather information and provide an open channel of communication. The old one way communication method is not enough anymore to engage with consumers interacted in the social sphere. These consumers demand to be listened and heard. As a result organizations and publics need to engage in an open dialogue in order to build a strong and long-term relationship.

Thus it is important for businesses to be aware of how culture, even those considered similar, can interfere with stakeholder’s perceptions and demand the elaboration of a specific crisis communication strategy. Intercultural communication is a topic extensively debate in society. However intercultural communication related to crisis is a relatively new area of research which requires further studies for further development in the field. Professionals and researchers in the communication area need to be aware of these transformations occurring in society and current global business. Society is changing due to technological advances and consumer behavior and the communication field needs to be aware of these transformations. Therefore I believe this study is part of a small but important contribution to the international public relations agenda.

## **5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The findings showed the link between Cultural Dimensions and Face-Negotiation Theory and the crisis communication field. Despite crisis communication theory having grown rapidly in recent decades there are subjects within the field that still require further development. Intercultural crisis management is one of these subjects. It is a topic that is gaining greater importance nowadays and it is affecting at a faster rate an increase number of individuals and corporations. Cultures that had little or no

contact before nowadays share several common elements and are in constant interaction with each other. Previous studies showed that this miscegenation of cultures interferes with the public's interpretation of a crisis (Lee 2004; Huang 2006). As a result, culture is considered a critical element when crisis management is involved (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 723).

In the literature review I confirmed the critical role that culture play in crisis situations. Several studies concluded that depending on the cultural outlook, the general public have different perceptions of the same event. This is an important statement because it shows the relevance of inserting the culture paradigm when considering a crisis communication plan. However the majority of these studies focused on countries with different cultures. According to Triandis (1994) "conflict is greater when the two cultures are very different than when they are similar". Based on this assumption I saw the need to also observe countries with similar cultural elements and verify if cultural aspects were also a critical element of disagreement.

The theories analyzed helped me comprehend the case with a holistic view. The Cultural Dimension theory helped me verify the cultural characteristics played an important element during crisis situations between United States and United Kingdom. Hofstede identified a critical cultural aspect presented in both countries. This aspect, the self-image and the urge of *face* protection, was responsible to define how both countries would behave during crisis. Influenced by the urge to protect their image they would do everything possible to dismiss any responsibility towards the case. For this study it means that based on this theory I was be able to present information of how UK and US culturally behaved and how these comportment were translated in the media coverage of the event.

The Face-Negotiation Theory guided me to understand how the tactics (*facework*) of each media channel were constructed in order to protect their image. It provided information of how this occurs and identified the tactics applied by United States and United Kingdom during conflicts and how this was interpreted by BCC and CNN in the media coverage of the Deepwater Horizon.

Furthermore it offered the study with insights into crisis communication and the role of cultural elements intrinsic to the situation, two crucial aspects for the understanding of the Deepwater Horizon event. Based on that I linked the data to the

theory and I found significant meanings embedded on the news coverage. The findings concluded that even cultures that share common cultural aspects perceive crisis through different views.

This is an important finding for the crisis communication arena because it draws attention to the appreciation of cultural perspectives when dealing with an international public even when there are cultural similarities. It also demonstrates once more the importance of targeting the audience.

Organizations based on the audience's characteristics must develop a communication plan that will match the public's needs. In this case since the American medium included corresponding subjects related to the Deepwater Horizon, it would be beneficial to BP's communication team to elaborate strategies that aim to complement and explain these raised issues. For instance CNN implied on its articles the need to reformulate the energy sector in US. BP's communication team being aware of this fact could have launched communication strategies showing the importance of offshore drilling to US economy and how this resource was being transformed into benefits for the whole American society. Also by demonstrating of how the technology was being used to reduce the risks of a new environmental damage would demonstrate BP as a company willing to improve. That way instead of only receiving negative statements about the energy regulations in US the audience would also be reminded of the opportunities and advantages that the offshore drilling brings to the country and the role of BP on it.

### **5.3 Limitations**

In this study I faced several limitations that interfered in the final findings of the thesis. Limitations were basically related to the sampling plan, data collection and the research design of the thesis.

First is the definition of the sampling. Despite the BBC and CNN representing valid sources for gathering the material they do not represent the whole media industry and/or the whole country perception of the case. I decided to analyse media coverage due to observation of the literature review that several studies in the field adapted this

methodology into their own studies and they reached significant discoveries in interpreting public's perception during crisis. However other media such as television, radio, magazines and so on were not included in the study. These other types of media channel also have a greater impact on public opinion. In addition they could have provided other valuable insights that the BBC and CNN did not cover in their articles.

The second limitation is related to the material collected. I opted to observe the media coverage of the first fifteen days following the accident because according to experts in the field the organization's early approach of a crisis situation determines the public's perception of the whole event. However, since I did not analyze the whole event I could have dismissed relevant information which could have facilitated a different interpretation of the case.

Finally, the last limitation results from the research design. The qualitative research gave me the opportunity to observe the case through a wide outlook. It means that provided me comprehension of the whole context of the event. In this case was important for the study also observe cultural, social, political and economical factors involving the spill. Those elements together gave a meaningful message for the event. Nevertheless the study would benefit from the inclusion of complementary research methods as well. That is, with the inclusion of another methodology tool, the study would offer more elements for comparison and the resulting evidence would improve the reliability.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for future research**

As intercultural crisis communication is considered a relatively new area, more studies in the field can definitely be a great inspiration to providing an open debate and theory contextualization in the field. Based on the results of the study there are some recommendations to be implemented in future researches.

Firstly, more studies in intercultural communication with similar cultures should be done. Then the findings of different studies could be compared and that way confirm if the Deepwater Horizon was an isolated case or is part of a new tendency in crisis communication. If similar results are also verified in other studies, then similar

cultures can be considered a determinant factor for interpreting a crisis and the crisis communication field will gain a new perspective.

Secondly, the inclusion of other types of media channels could bring a different insight to the crisis communication arena. Every type of mass media sets its own agenda differently and carries a peculiar characteristic (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Therefore the inclusion of other mass media channels would also embrace these others agendas resulting in a holistic view of the media arena and consequently of the event.

Finally, the oil industry has significant importance to the global economy and it is vital for the sustainability of society. Petroleum is arguably the most important global commodity. However, petroleum is also considered controversial and has been the center of environmental and climate debates. “Oil industry crises are also unique in terms of magnitude. Explosions have the potential for death and serious injury as well as significant property damage. However, because of the priority oil plays in the national and international economy and politics, the reach of an oil industry crisis touches many and media attention can be extraordinary” (Maresh & Williams cited in Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 285). Therefore due to the greater potential of destruction and high possibility of occurrence, the oil industry is a sector that needs constant revision of its methods and strategies in crisis communication.

As a conclusion, further studies in the aforementioned directions can complement the results of this thesis, contributing further to this particular line of study and consequently benefiting the whole communication field as well. It is important that more studies are conducted in order to observe if in similar situations the findings would be the same or if the BP incident and the relationship between the USA and the UK is merely an exception. With more studies in this area, new paradigms and statements will be created and a more targeted campaign/strategy could be implemented.

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